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ABSTRACT

The following papers are included: "Social Classification of Women's Work" (Benn, Burton); "Developing Models of Learning from Experience" (Boud, Walker); "'Research Reflecting Practice?'" (Edwards, Usher); "Metaphors and Their Implications for Research and Practice in Adult and Community Education" (Hunt); "'Common-Sense' Approach to Reflection" (Russon); "Generating Knowledge in Practice" (Sisto, Hillier); "Taking the Epistemology" (Steele); "Feminist Issues in Adult Education Research" (Zukas); "Group Based Research" (Anderson); "Adult Education as History" (Chase); "Researching the Use and Evaluation of Experiential Teaching Methods in University-Based Adult and Continuing Education" (Cherrington, van Ments); "Is History Different?" (Coles); "Discussion Groups and Researcher Bias" (Dawson); "A Becoming of Gatekeepers" (Duke); "The Lone Adult-Education Researcher" (Greenland); "Reflecting Research Practice" (Newton); "'Hero(in)es of Labour'" (Payne); "Analysing the Effectiveness of Distance Learning Methods with 'Disadvantaged' Groups in Continuing Education" (Withnall); "The Multiple Self in the Unity of Adult Learning" (Daggett); "Becoming More Reflexive as a Researcher" (Johnston); "Collecting Data and Recollecting in Tranquility" (Jones); "Doing Adult Education Research through Autobiography" (Miller); "Changing Places" (O'Rouke); "'Speaking Personally'" (Stuart); "Adult Learning and Life Histories" (Thomson); "On Keeping a Diary" (West, Alexopoulou); "Issues in Researching a Common Practice" (Anderson, Boud, Sampson); "Whose Line Is It Anyway?" (Bryant); "Practitioner-based Enquiry" (Davis); "Practitioner Research as Continuing Self-Education" (Hampton, Hampton); "Practitioners as Researchers" (Thorpe); "Adult Educators' Reflections on M.Ed. Projects which They Had Undertaken" (Watson); "Keeping the Customer Satisfied" (Armstrong); "Researching Educational and Training Guidance Needs of Bilingual Women" (Brah, Kaye); "Collaborative Research Practices and the Wider Community" (Forrester); "Student Research and LEA (Local Education Agency) Adult and Continuing Education" (Jones); "Negotiating the Minefield" (Malcolm); "Research and Development Issues for Vocational Education and Training" (McDonald et al.); "University-Based Adult Education and the Field of Practice" (Millar); "Politics of Research" (Patel); "When the Chips Are Down" (Winterton); "Access Course Feedback" (Day, Highton); "On the Relationship between Researcher and Researched" (Edwards); "Evaluation and Accountability in the Research Process" (Lawrence); and "Working Collaboratively on Research into Collaborative Working" (Shuttleworth). Some papers contain substantial bibliographies. (MN)

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SCUTREA

STANDING CONFERENCE ON UNIVERSITY TEACHING AND RESEARCH IN THE EDUCATION OF ADULTS

RESEARCH: REFLECTING PRACTICE

EDITED BY NOD MILLER & DAVID J. JONES

PAPERS FROM THE 23RD ANNUAL CONFERENCE
UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER, 6-8 JULY 1993

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Introduction

Nod Miller, University of Manchester
David Jones, University of Nottingham

THE papers in this volume were prepared for the 23rd Annual Conference of the Standing Conference on University Teaching and Research in the Education of Adults, held at Allen Hall, University of Manchester, 6 to 8 July 1993, which takes as its theme 'Research: Reflecting Practice'.

The planning of this conference began almost immediately after work on the last volume of Conference Proceedings (Miller and West, 1992) was completed. The critical importance of research in adult and continuing education was underlined in 1992, with many person-hours being devoted to the completion of returns for the Research Assessment Exercise, and threats to the continued funding of research by the HEFCs. The emphasis on research output in the assessment of research has brought about a shift in the climate of adult and continuing education departments, with what was at one time a relatively relaxed attitude to the production of research papers giving way to a desperation to publish. A series of Study Days was organised in 1992 by SCUTREA, in conjunction with UCACE, PACE and SRHE, to discuss and plan a research agenda for the field. One important suggestion which came out of the study days was that there should be more systematic training in research methodologies appropriate to the field of adult education. This led to discussions about a conference on research processes and practice, and thus the topic of this conference was agreed.

An earlier version of the conference theme was 'The Reflective Researcher', playing on the titles of two influential texts in the field of adult learning (Schön, 1983, 1987). The organising group felt that 'Research: Reflecting Practice' might attract participants with a wide range of perspectives on the research process, including practitioners, teachers and others who do not primarily define themselves as researchers.

We were extremely gratified by the response to our call for papers. Among the contributors are many established researchers and others at the beginning of their research careers, including several postgraduate students. We are particularly glad to welcome a number of contributors from outside Britain.

The papers are arranged into six strands, each with an introduction by one of the members of the conference organising group. Papers in the first strand, on **Epistemology**, deal with central questions about how knowledge is generated through the research process. As Linden West notes, the multi-faceted nature of theoretical influences at large in the world of adult education research at present is apparent in the diverse contributions to this section.

Methodological issues are dealt with in strand 2, the papers here addressing technical, personal, ethical and political issues in relation to methods of gathering and accumulating data. The strand on **Practitioner-based research** contains studies by teachers, students or organisers in adult education, many of the contributors raising questions concerning the notion of 'objectivity' in relation to this type of research.

The strand on **Auto/biography** contains papers which describe and analyse aspects of life history, some dealing with the autobiographical experience of the researcher and some with life stories of others. The papers in the strand on **External relations and accountability** examine the relationship between research activity and the wider context in which this activity takes place. A theme of several of the papers is the discomfort sometimes arising out of pressure to meet the demands of research funders and sponsors.

The final strand deals with issues concerning **Relationships** (of researchers) **to the researched,** exploring long-debated questions about whose side we (as researchers) are on, and exploring the extent to which new research paradigms make possible more emancipatory relationships — or more truely participatory research.

There are some perennial themes and debates which cut across all the strands. Many of the contributors here are concerned with ethical issues in research, with issues of 'objectivity' and 'subjectivity', with questions of the ownership of knowledge produced through research and with struggles over power and control. The theoretical perspectives and disciplinary bases on which the various writers draw are extremely varied: there are papers grounded in history, psychology, sociology, cultural studies, postmodernism, poststructuralism, feminism, psychoanalysis, theology, philosophy, English literature and even New Age consciousness. Similarly, a broad spectrum of methodologies is represented, including statistical analysis, interviewing, oral history, textual analysis, participant observation and auto/biography.

A notable feature of this year's papers is the way in which many contributors reject positivistic approaches to reseach. Not long ago, we suspect, there would have been a certain defensiveness about adopting such a stance. Now there is a celebration of the fact that the researcher is an intrinsic part of the research. Writer after writer characterises adult education research as a quest for understanding rather than a process of discovering social 'facts' or of offering scientific 'proof'. Questions of replicability and objectivity are set aside in favour of a search for insight and meaning. The work involved in constructing this meaning is likened by one contributor to that of the poet.

The scholarship reflected in these papers is of a high standard, and reflects the quality of work being carried out in this field. This volume stands as evidence of the great loss that educational research would suffer if resources were not made available to enable this work to continue.

In recent years, those involved in organising the SCUTREA conference have experimented with a variety of forms of conference design, with the intention of maximising the learning opportunities in the conference in keeping with good adult education practice. One innovative feature this year is a research hypothetical, an improvised role-play exercise designed to highlight the politics and dynamics of a research project from its conception to publication. The conference will conclude with a session enabling participants to reflect upon the experience of the conference and to consolidate what they have learned from the event.

One important aspect of the research process which is dealt with in relatively few of the papers here is the dissemination of findings. We hope that this collection of papers will be distributed widely, and that it will prove useful to a wide range of adult education researchers and practitioners, providing stimulation to experienced researchers and inspiration to those embarking upon a first research project. We also hope that it will serve to spread the message that research in adult education is alive and well and deserves continued support and funding.

Gratitude is due to all members of the organising group for their enthusiam and hard work. Special thanks go to Barbara Jones for her tireless and cheerful style in dealing with the administration of the conference, and to Rod Allen, without whose epic typesetting efforts this book would never have made it to the conference, and whose awesome professional skills in graphic design and typography brought it here looking as good as it does.

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THE STANDING CONFERENCE ON UNIVERSITY TEACHING AND RESEARCH IN THE EDUCATION OF ADULTS

SCUTREA is a forum for all concerned with research into the education of adults and those involved in the development of adult education as a body of knowledge.

It began as an organisation with a membership consisting solely of university departments of adult education. SCUTREA now draws upon a broader constituency and welcomes individual and institutional members from across the educational field. Adult education is a growing and fast-changing sector, and at this time SCUTREA provides a focus for the diverse interests of practitioners and researchers. It is a pivotal point in the adult education world in Britain, and is also linked to organisations in both the North and the South, enhancing members' access to international contacts.

The SCUTREA annual conference is a major event in the adult education calendar. In addition, smaller workshops, conferences and seminars are organised throughout the year. Members' research and teaching interests are linked through working groups which any member is welcome to join. A termly newsletter, Scoop, is published.

The dynamism of SCUTREA is reflected in the publications that have been generated from the working groups and conferences, and the organisation looks forward to an expansive period during the coming years.

Membership of SCUTREA is open to individuals and institutions who are accepted by its Council as 'making a contribution to the study of or research into any aspect of learning, education or training in adulthood'.

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1. Epistemological issues

Introduction by Linden West
University of Kent

I was pleased to be asked to write an introduction to a series of papers exploring the epistemological dimension of reflective practice. I hoped for new perspectives on the theory and practice of current research to help me make more sense of my own work and therefore better able to justify it, most of all to myself. I wanted in-depth debate about the nature of truth and validity in new paradigm research.

I soon realised I was entering a post-modernist landscape where nothing is certain, all that is solid seems to melt into air, to paraphrase Marx. I was confused about what I was reading and was reminded of Jameson's description of the Bonaventura Hotel in Los Angeles in an essay on post-modernism (Jameson 1984). He suggested the hotel was symbolic of contemporary culture in that it represented a kind of post-modern hyperspace, transcending the capacity of the human mind to locate itself within the structure or to grasp the totality of the building. At best, one might observe and comprehend discrete elements in a grand display of bewildering eclecticism redolent of a society of disorientating, kaleidoscopic change and possibility.

Like parts of the hotel in Jameson's essay individual papers made sense on their own but, at first reading, appeared to move in different directions, with contrasting language, style and metaphor. Ignatius Loyola, feminist research, Gaia, learning from experience and post-modernist deconstruction of reflective practice appeared to constitute SCUTREA's equivalent of the Bonaventura. I thought I had better simply note the diversity of styles and abandon an attempt to synthesise or describe the whole. After all, the difficulty of seeing the overall picture is, as Jameson suggests, a central manifestation of the post-modernist condition.

Tom Steele helped a little in his paper on 'Taking the epistemology' by reminding me that adult education research has always been promiscuous, drawing its methods and assumptions about validity from diverse sources (admittedly with discomfort and reservation among those wanting a conventional, foundational rigour) and trusting that something better, more all embracing, would emerge. The thought that the past seemed diverse too and yet within the chaos and promiscuity great insights were developed (for example, in labour history and cultural studies) and better methodologies created (participatory research, oral/life history work) prompted a re-read. Broader patterns and possibilities might emerge from these essays as a whole, if I could live for a while with confusion and difference.

As I read more intensely, patterns did emerge, similarities as well as contrasts. There was, for example, a healthy diffidence and reflectiveness in the writing. There was a determination to reassess the relationship between the particular and general and to acknowledge that, in the past, a search for universal meaning, for truth, for objectivity, for positivist science has sometimes damaged, violated, silenced individuals and groups or at least badly distorted the nuance and specificity of their story. The further removed from experience, what the psychologist Kohut called experience-distant rather than experience-near theories, the more abstract and generalised, the more detached from the reality on the ground, the more potentially dangerous and distortive, is one message from this writing.

There is equally a shared assertion that research should, one way or another, be transformative: it should offer space for people to tell and make their own stories and to celebrate the consciousness and energy for change which this can bring; or at least to see human beings, cultures, as whole entities: socio-political, physical as well as spiritual beings. To do so can transform people's consciousness of what is needed, and their potential to play a part. Finally there is some, if not universal, celebration of new times, a feeling, however fragile, of faith in the future. The old certainties have gone leaving room for a more pluralistic, democratised culture of many truths, ways of being and seeing.

Edwards and Usher in their paper on 'Modern Paradigms and Postmodern Controversies' appear most at home in this world. They celebrate the insights of deconstructionism and turn their attention to current research. For them the reality of much reflective practice remains old objectivist wine in new bottles. Research is used to regulate: part of what they call a 'power-knowledge formation of concern' for 'effectiveness and efficiency' which limits its emancipatory and democratic potential. And research as reflective practice can, they suggest, remain bedeviled by an illusion of ultimately verifiable knowledge to be found if only one searches deeply and exhaustively enough.

Zukas shares a similar view in her paper on 'Feminist issues in adult education research: links and conflicts'. She also questions the discourse of universal truths about, for example, adult learning which, when deconstructed, reveals a patriarchal, individualistic ideology at its andragogical core. She wants instead 'psychologies', particularly a 'psychology for women', which derive from 'ideas about the specificity and social construction ofknowledge, the conjunction ofknowledge and power, the relationship between language and subjectivity and the analysis of discourse and rhetoric'.

Benn and Burton are on similar ground in their essay on the social classification of women's work. They believe that conventional typologies, based as they are on male occupations, have constrained social researchers from arriving at a fuller understanding of the experiences of women. Life histories and women's encounters with Access courses and higher education more generally have been distorted as a result. Conventional classifications have failed to acknowledge the bias and context at their heart.

Boud and Walker, in a paper on 'Developing models of learning from experience', are, like Zukas, sensitive about the relationship between the particular and the general. They too are aware of the shortcomings of 'psychologically-orientated literature' which fails to encompass the 'complex interactions of person, space and culture'. But they continue to insist that models have a place, depending on their sophistication and the humility shown in using them. Sometimes, they conclude, the subject is too vast and complicated for any model 'to emerge'.

The other writers view the scene from different locations but on occasions reach related if not identical conclusions. Sisto and Hillier in a study of midwifery training challenge positivism and all its works. Their message is that critical reflectivity, delving deeper into practice to produce and reproduce knowledge, offers a promising basis for a professional, more meaningful curriculum. Russon explores inner space and finds a possibility of transcendence, of meaning, in the reflective techniques of Ignatius Loyola, where direction and intelligibility can derive from feelings of truth and integrity in the innermost parts. Hunt in her paper on metaphor looks to a greater awareness of the delicate thread linking the internal and external world. She finds in the chaos and dislocation of present times a potential new paradigm, a different, more holistic, organic way of conceiving relationships between people, cultures, as well as within the research process. Gaia offers a metaphor of interconnectedness, in contrast to the narrowness of Newtonian physics and the reductionism of the machine metaphor. She believes the new paradigm enables individuals to search for their own meaning, unfettered by artificial boundaries or expectations. It is also a place in which researcher and researched are perceived to be inseparable, subjects in search of a shared perspective.

So there are patterns, interconnections, to be found in these papers as well as divergence. Objectivist, machine-like positivism is or ought to be dead. Detail, like individuals, matters. Generalities are not excluded but carry a peril of reductionism. It is time to listen, engage and respect the other in the research encounter; and the researcher's pre-text, maybe their whole being, is of relevance. There is also an enthusiasm, a belief in the possibility of transformation through reflective practice, if spaces can only be reclaimed by and for those who have hitherto been silenced.

But there is caution too. Research of a new hermeneutic, post-modernist kind, like education more generally, asks much of those involved. The researcher needs to understand her or himself — the pre-text and more; to appreciate the power and politics of research — the con-texts. And to acknowledge the partiality, historicity and social construction of knowledge — the subtexts. The fact that this is understood and that there continues to be enthusiasm for the validity of reflective practice, however disorientating, threatening, limiting and unsympathetic the current climate, is a sign that a democratic instinct of enquiry is alive and well.

REFERENCE

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Social classification of women's work: a research problem

Roseanne Benn and Rob Burton
University of Exeter

> While stratificatory schemata may have their roots in class relations, they are sustained by society's value systems, which in turn camouflage the class structure, rendering it opaque to the understanding of its members and not infrequently even to the purview of the scientist. The class roots of social stratification are not always easy to get inasmuch as they are almost never directly given. (Saffioti, 1978)

Background

THIS paper is a working document based upon a partial analysis of questionnaires returned from a national survey of Access Students. The questionnaire, 'Attitudes to Mathematics' has been sent to 3512 students on Access to Social Science and Humanities courses (20% sample) and Access to Teacher Education courses (100% sample) in 111 institutions in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. This report is based upon a sample of 1000 questionnaires.

One of the central questions addressed by our research is whether the requirement to hold a GCE O'Level (or its equivalent) for entry to a number of higher education courses acts as a barrier for either women as a whole or certain groups of women.

Introduction

Empirical research has traditionally used the Registrar General's (RG) classification of occupations as the method of classifying people in the social structure. However, past theoretical and research debates concerning social classification and women (Stanworth 1984; Middleton 1974; Ritter and Hargens 1975) would suggest that perceptions of women on Access gained through use of this classification may not bear close relation to reality.

Experience in development of, and teaching on, Access led us to believe that a clearer understanding of the women who populate Access would be gained if we had recourse to information about other social variables, i.e. how many children they had, what was their personal income, what was their own job or last job, was it part-time or full-time.

In the development of this approach, the work by Helen Roberts and Ray Barker at the Social Statistics Research Unit of City University (1986, 1987, 1989, 1990) came to our attention. Although not designed specifically in accordance with their criteria, many of our questions conform to their work. We feel that our data is sufficiently reliable to re-open the debate concerning the validity of the RG scale, in particular for research into areas such as adult education where the majority of students are women.

The Social Classification of Women's Work (SCOWW) — a brief explanation

The basis of this classification is the work a woman does. To the conventional Office of Population Censuses and Surveys (OPCS) understanding of what constitutes work, Roberts has added household work concerned with the care of children or the elderly and a greater emphasis on whether the work is full or part time.

The problem

For our pilot study, women were classified by their own occupations using the RG's scale. This immediately raised a methodological problem insomuch as it is recognised that this scale does not 'fit' easily into research where the majority of respondents will be female. As Abbott and Sapsford (1987) suggest, the conventional view of stratification and class theories tend to focus on male occupations. This, they argue, is because women are ignored in many theories of social class. The position taken by many researchers and amplified by scales such as the RG's is that 'women are marginal to the occupational structure [and] their social class position is...determined by the (male) head of household' (Abbott and Sapsford 1987).

Consequently, in order to provide an adequate representation of women on Access courses without succumbing to the traditional sociological analysis which leads to the 'misrepresentation of [women's] class, life-changes, life-styles, patterns of association and socio-political orientation' (Delphy and Leonard 1986, p.72-73), we felt that we needed an alternative approach.

We were in a dilemma. Most comparable research in this area is based on the RG classification. But we question how useful a scale can be where 38% of women, when classified by their own occupation, are classified as 'other' (see Table 2 below). It seemed impossible to make any clear analysis of the situation when as social researchers we were still restricted by the patriarchal biases of the RG's classification system.

In an analysis of work which attempts to provide an adequate representation of women's social stratification, Abbott and Sapsford (1987 p30) suggest that many of the scales so far developed including those which take a feminist perspective, fail 'to include full-time housewives, taking account of unpaid work performed in the patriarchal mode of production'. We believe that the Social Classification of Women's Work at least partially answers this criticism and have therefore incorporated it into our methodology.

The data

Of the 1000 respondents to the questionnaire currently analysed 690 are women. Of these women the social class breakdown is as follows:

Table 1
Access Distribution (as a %. N=690)
Women's social classification by their own occupation

Classes	1	2	3	4	5	'OTHER'
RG	0.2	25	53	13.7	2.6	4.5
SCOWW	28	33.5	17	4.7	16.1	

Table 2

Population Distribution of Great Britain. (as a %)
Women's social classification by their own occupation

Classes	1	2	3	4	5	'OTHER'
RG	1	13	29	13	5	38
SCOWW	6	21	49	17	7	

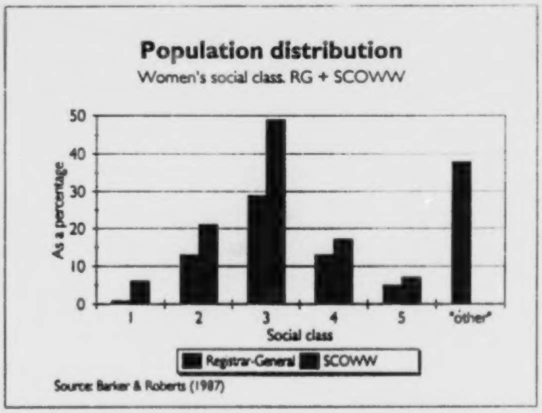
(Source: Barker and Roberts 1989)

Table 3

The Chances of women being represented on an Access course by Class.

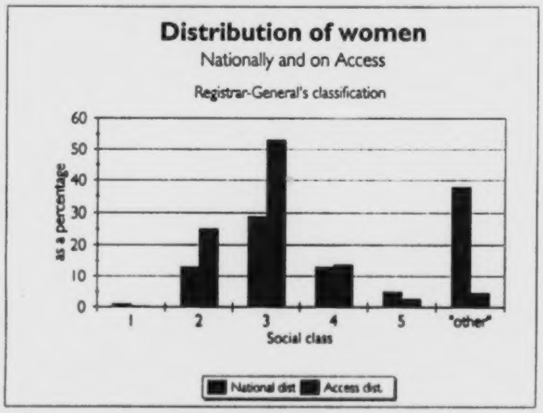
Classes	1	2	3	4	5
RG	1:5	2:1	2:1	1:1	1:2
SCOWW	5:1	3:2	1:3	2:7	5:2

Analysis



Source: Barker & Roberts (1987)

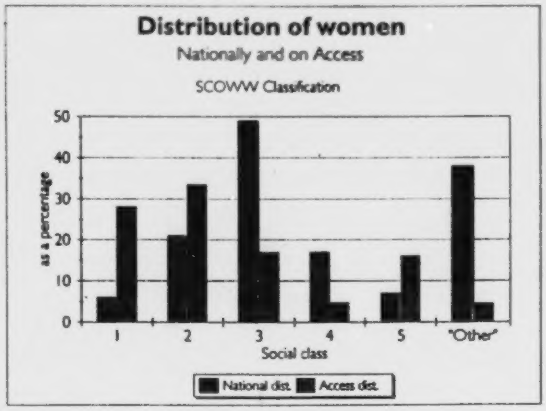
When we compare both scales for population distribution, in general we see the classic distribution shapes one would expect from this sort of survey. However, the essence of our argument is that it is impossible to use the Registrar General scale for any analysis related to women due to the presence (or non presence) of 38% of women classified as 'other'.



Over half the women on Access courses are placed in RG classification 3 concurring with Oakley's thesis (1974) that many women are to be found in service sector clerical and secretarial work. However, when we look more widely at the distribution of women on Access courses against the national distribution we find that the statistics become skewed. The 38% other in the national picture makes comparisons meaningless.

Women from class 1 have only a 1 in 5 chance of being represented on an Access course. This is not unexpected as women classified as 1 by the RG are for example solicitors, doctors and so would already hold degrees.

The SCOWW scale provides us with a significantly different perception of how women are represented on Access. This distribution raises difficulties, namely the imbalance between classes 4 and 5. If this is showing us a true picture of Access and our incomplete data has not skewed the figures, then we may

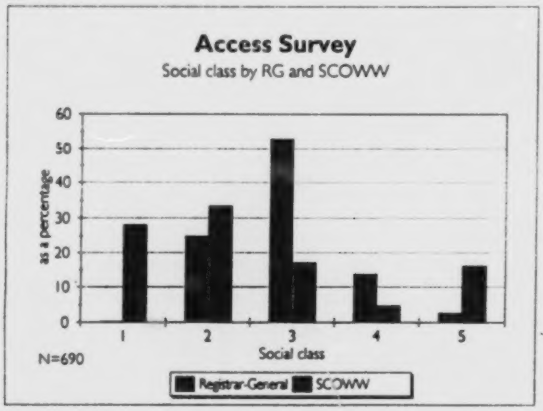


need to consider a number of causal explanations. It could be that this relatively large representation of class 5 could indicate the numbers of people from lower grade occupations becoming unemployed (we coded current or last occupation). These may be utilizing Access to gain some social mobility, having nothing to lose by attempting Access. Class 4, may still be in work and have more to lose, in terms of financial, occupational and domestic security.

The higher representation of class 5 women could also be accounted for by the number of women who have dependent relatives and have to work part-time as well as continue with their studies on Access. Without further data, it is not possible to interpret the class 4 and class 5 figures. At present we are unsure whether they lead us to believe that class 5 are populating Access due perhaps to targeting or class 4 continue not to participate in education.

Undoubtedly, work still needs to be done with this scale in order to clarify the anomalies we are presented with. What is clear is that the SCOWW classification shows classes 1 and 2 colonising and monopolising Access.

This differing perception is clarified in graph 4 which presents us with seemingly incompatible interpretations of our data.



To understand fully the reality of women's lives in a modern society we suggest that social researchers need to make a perspective transformation to move away from the familiarity of the Registrar General's scale to a scale that more closely reflects social reality.

Classification of occupations: a perspective transformation

> ... familiarity with the incumbent system and the fact that it is generally accepted — by politicians, for instance — can count highly for certain users: civil servants or those hoping to influence public opinion and policy with their findings (Szreter 1984. p.539)
>
> ... scales which are fundamentally at variance with social reality ... (Roberts 1987. p.39)
>
> Perspective transformation is the emancipatory process of becoming critically aware of how and why the structure of psycho-cultural assumptions has come to constrain the way we see ourselves and our relationships, reconstituting this structure to permit a more inclusive and discriminating integration of experience and acting upon these new understandings (*sic*) (Mezirow, 1981)

Lieven (1989) felt able, on the basis of results from earlier research into Access, to state that "Despite some discrepancies between surveys it is clear that Access courses have been dramatically successful in enrolling students from systemically disadvantaged groups who, historically, have been largely 'excluded' from the full range of educational provision'.

Our work, using the RG scale, suggests that we have difficulty in concurring with Lieven. Access courses across the country seem to be populated in the main by classes 2 and 3. Our position is supported by published figures (Benn and Fieldhouse 1993, Halsey 1992) which show that working class representation in Universities has dropped between 1985 and 1990 and that inequality still persists.

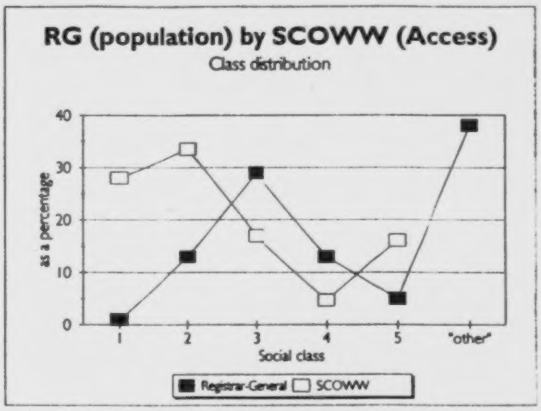
However all of this work has used the RG classification as its base of analysis, a structure which Szreter argues is:

> an obsolete conceptual framework [which] is insidiously continuing to exert an influence over current analyses of social behaviour (Szreter 1984. p539)

We are presented with a different picture when we apply the SCOWW scale to our data. Here Access is populated in the main by women from class 1 and class 2. These figures undoubtedly reinforce the Marxist theory of education for the bourgeoisie.

The SCOWW scale leads us to a perspective where it seems that Access is populated in the main by women from the social classes 1 and 2, contradicting the earlier RG-based analysis which suggests Access is in the main attracting women social classes 2 and 3. We believe the SCOWW is rendering the opaque nature (Saffioti, 1978) of the RG's perspective open to further analysis. We believe this scale enables us to look more closely and effectively at the class positions of women on Access courses.

A false consciousness and a perspective transformation:



Graph 5 allows us to attempt to break through the types of false consciousness that surrounds research into women's lives.

The RG normal distribution curve is one we all carry around with us in our heads. Social reality has to conform more or less to this line. By superimposing the SCOWW Access distribution over the RG population (women by their own occupations) something happens. We are presented with a new picture of women on Access.

What this graph shows, we suggest, is the situation on Access once the patriarchal biases and the cultural assumptions about women are stripped away. We suggest the false consciousness of patriarchy has restricted social researchers from arriving at more discriminating conclusions concerning the experiences of women and thus hindered true understanding of the distribution of women on Access.

Conclusions

Empirical research of this type, where the respondents are in the main women, is traditionally dependent upon a classification system that is 'claimed to be a tolerably accurate model of the British social structure' (Szreter 1984 p.523). This raises questions about a social structure that has apparently remained unchanged since the inception of the RG scale in 1913 and women's perceived role in that structure.

Robert's and Barker's work and SCOWW allow us to break through the opaque nature and false consciousness of this type of redundant, patriarchal social classification to provide what we believe is an important insight into the real lives of women. It allows us, as researchers, to interpret data from a new perspective. It transforms the inflexible and the archaic into an appropriate and contemporary tool of social scientific analysis. It moves away from what Szreter has criticised as a 'paradigm for an adequate explanation which no longer corresponds either to that which is most elegant...nor to that which is most consistent with what we believe we know of nature'(ibid p.539) towards a new understanding of women's lives. By comparing two scales, we are able to gain an insight into what we believe is closer to the real nature of Access.

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Developing models of learning from experience

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WE have been concerned with making sense of learning from experience over many years. Our interest has been an essentially pragmatic one—how to improve the quality of experience-based learning from the point of view of both learners and those who assist learning (teachers, facilitators, peers, etc.). This has led us to a concern about how to represent our understandings in simple models that we can use and which will provide a helpful prompt to others' practice. While our yardstick has always been to develop approaches which work for us in our own practice, we have also been committed to the conception and articulation of ideas in ways which make them accessible and useable to other teachers and learners.

Our work together began with the book *Reflection: Turning Experience into Learning* (1985), which explored a variety of strategies and devices to encourage reflection on learning, and moved to examining learning through reflection-in-action and reflection following experience (Boud and Walker 1990). The focus of this latter work was on the development of a model which is directed towards the facilitation of deliberate learning from experience. Our concern with learning from experience has found most recent expression in *Using Experience for Learning* (Boud, Cohen and Walker, in press) which considers how a group of diverse adult educators describe their own learning from experience in their personal and professional lives.

A key element of this latest book is the idea that contributors reflect on their own learning from experience and how they have come to their present appreciation of the issues. In the present paper we use this approach and focus it on our experience in developing and using models of facilitating learning. We have reflected on the development of our own ideas and tried to extract from our experience of working with models what we believe to be important features or ways of assessing what counts as a good model.

Whilst we point to criteria helpful in judging how useful a model might be for practice, there are different categories of criteria which are important: those related to the intention or scope of the aspect being modelled, those concerning prominent features or emphases and those relating to the fine grain of details. An effective model must be judged with respect to each of these levels.

Well-known models meet some criteria well but not others. Kolb/Lewin (1984) is useful at the micro level for planning teaching, but it does not take sufficient account of reflective processes and the prior experiences of learners. Schön (1987) is very strong on reflection, but is somewhat elusive as a guide to practice and is difficult to visualise. Jarvis (1987) points to the importance of the social context in learning, but his own model of learning processes reflects his data and is too complex for ready use. No model cannot embrace everything which is important: the challenge in creating a model is in deciding what to include and what to ignore. The fact that some gain prominence is testimony to the fact that they speak to matters which are important.

Developing models[1]

In our original book on reflection, we made a conscious decision to articulate our experience in a model. This did not arise from any theory about models, but was simply an effort to communicate what we had learned about reflection. We did not realise the importance of this decision at the time. Looking back, three significant things emerge about the model we created: it was a tentative and simple model directed to practice. It emerged from our experience and was directed to the experience of others. We didn't build the model around these qualities. They are qualities that have become apparent during our use of, and reflection, on it.

- Models are always *tentative* ways of viewing the world which may or may not be useful for the task in hand. When they are used in a fixed, rigid, inflexible way, their usefulness is limited. It is important that the model does not become more important than what it tries to facilitate, e.g. reflection on experience. When this happens, the model is no longer the instrument but the end in itself. The model must always be open to moderation in the light of further experience.
- Rather than attempting to portray the full complexity of promoting learning from experience, models should be *simple* and focused on some elements which are regarded

as problematic. They should avoid context-specific details. We consciously refrained from adding various feedback loops to our model—these are clearly essential to any application but they can also complicate and distract from the elements we wished to present.

- A good model directs attention to issues which are *related to practice* and have an impact on it. It prompts learning through drawing attention to matters which may not previously have been given sufficient attention. For example, we have emphasised the importance of recapturing experience and attending to feelings. In our observations of adult learning activities these are elements which are frequently ignored, particularly when teaching occurs in formal classroom settings.
- Models for practice work when they are *rooted in specific experience* and speak to experience. Our original base of experience was participation as learners and facilitators in a great variety of experience-based learning activities. Our intention was to develop ideas which resonated with those with whom we collaborated and which they could use to inform their own practice. The fact that our model spoke to a wider audience was a bonus which emerged later.

Other features of our original model have been brought home to us by the experience of others in using it. We have been delighted that our model has been used and validated in areas as varied as the education of health professionals, organisational development in government departments, and in many countries. Attention has been given to it because we believe it is one of the few frameworks which exist which help make sense of the business of debriefing or structured reflection after complex participatory learning activities, and which directs the attention of the facilitator to specific categories of activity with which it might be useful for learners to engage. The acceptance which it gained was due in large part to the recognition of the elements which experienced practitioners identified from their own experience. The experience of those who have used it show that it has features which address other desirable criteria for models: openness, challenge and scope for testing.

- Models should be *open* to being added to as required in particular situations and key elements can be developed further in context-specific ways. We found that while different terminology is used in different practice settings, each context can be accommodated within our model, so, or example, it can be used as readily for debriefing games and simulations as work experience.
- While having within it sufficient elements which find ready acceptance, they should *challenges practice* and point to areas which require attention. For example, our approach emphasises that it is important to avoid jumping to analysis during reflection on experience. We also suggest issues which may need to be confronted by learners before this.
- They should be formulated in ways which *invite testing* through the experience of others. They can be validated through such experiential assessment. Since a model always embodies limited experience it must be open to be modified in the light of further experience.

Feedback and constructive criticism of our model revealed issues that are important and which did not find sufficient expression in our original formulation. In pointing out some aspects that were not considered, and suggesting others that have arisen since, our critics have encouraged us to re-evaluate our model. We found that we could incorporate further elements without altering the key elements of the original. As we thought about this we identified another important characteristics of models: the need to show relationships.

- Within a model, elements should be set in relation one to another rather than as an assortment of isolated insights. Good models can often be summarised diagrammatically to show linkages between various elements and as a convenient aide memoire. It is often the model that can be captured visually that provides sufficient prompt for practitioners to recall it readily in the midst of practice.

Following our first publication about a model we realised that it did not go far enough: it didn't take account of what precedes a learning event (experience and conscious design/preparation), what occurs during an event (noticing, intervention and reflection-in-action) and didn't take account of a more critical approach to reflection (in which basic assumptions are identified and subjected to scrutiny). We did not change our model of reflection, but, with it as our starting point, we developed a further representation directed towards facilitating learning from experience. This had the effect of putting our reflection model within an appropriate context, and allowed its elements to be related more clearly to what is actually taking place in experience. It showed that the original could be incorporated constructively into a larger model, and thus perform its task more effectively.

- Models should be sufficiently *robust* that further development of them can be incorporated. They should be able to form part of a broader representation without losing the characteristics which prove to be most helpful. Our original representation of reflection after an event was sufficiently robust that it could be incorporated into a more comprehensive model of facilitating learning from experience without basic change.

Interestingly, when we came to apply our current version of our model to the experience of working and learning together, we found it very productive, but were confronted with the difficulty of communicating this to others—the link between the model and our insights were obscure to readers. This led us to reflect on the mystery of the process which occurs between application of the model and outcome and the problem of expression. What is produced relates to the learners, and their past, rather than to the model, even though engagement with the model occasioned it: different people will take quite different things from their engagement with the same model. We found that the limits of a model are important features of it.

- Models may most usefully be *generative and provocative* rather than explicit and sequential. They are devices which prompt users to move in the direction that they want to go, with reminders of what they might consider rather than a statement of what they *should* do. The model is effective when it acts to generate further reflection rather than when it appears to explain experience. It should stimulate dialogue and indicate possibilities rather than prescribe outcomes.

We have found that some aspects of making sense of learning from experience leads to the development of models, whereas others cannot be expressed in this form. In the recent book, we found that we were unable to summarise the main features in a model; we listed them in propositional form.. This prompted us to ask why no model emerged? Could it be that the subject we were tackling was vaster, and more complex? Or that the possible applications were too great? Whatever be the reason, we felt no compulsion to create a model. After all, the model is an instrument for expression and communication, and it may not always be the best instrument to achieve these things.

Concluding thoughts

While there has been extensive discussion of models in theory-building and research, less emphasis has been given to the development of models to aid teaching and learning. Many of the more general model-building considerations are important in this context. In our terms, a model is both a personal reminder for us as learners, and an instrument which teachers or facilitators can use to introduce to others key ideas about learning. It acts as a kind of mental map or schema which represents ideas or issues that we have found to be important and want to incorporate into our practice, and as a means of communicating these notions to others. We believe there is a close link between models and experience. They are attempts to conceptualise knowledge gained from experience.

One key issue which requires further exploration is the extent to which any model of *learning* places the learner as the centrepiece. Traditionally we have been influenced by the individualistic, psychologically oriented literature and, while neither of us are psychologists, we can see some features of this tendency in our own work. But more and more, such a framing of learning alone is becoming inadequate, not capturing the complex interactions of person, context and culture. We need to find ways of acknowledging the individual as social and context-bound whilst allowing for the possibilities of transformation.

FOOTNOTE

[1] The space restrictions of this paper leave us with no room to present the details of our own models. However, in this section we describe the development of them, extract some general points about models and illustrate these with examples drawn from them.

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'Research: reflecting practice'? Modern paradigms, postmodern controversies

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IN placing a question mark after the title for this conference we wish to draw attention to the unstated assumptions implied in the title about what legitimately constitutes 'research'. We want to argue that these assumptions because of their location as an unacknowledged modernist paradigm of knowledge and knowledge-production raise a number of problematic issues in relation to research. We want to question the widely accepted belief that replacing discipline-based with practice-based, action-orientated research, positivist with interpretive approaches, quantitive with qualitative methods, has meant that somehow research no longer operates within such a paradigm, with its limiting and oppressive consequences therefore no longer present. Our aim in this paper is briefly to sketch some of the challenges which a postmodern critique poses to this belief and to the modernist paradigm of research in general. In doing this, we hope to signal that practice-based research can easily become part of a discourse with oppressive consequences and therefore cannot be thought of as simply possessing an *inherent* and necessary emancipatory potential.

We would readily acknowledge that the attempt to legitimise research as a reflection of practice was an important strategic element in the move away from purely discipline-based research. This move can be seen in a larger context as the consequence of an epistemological shift from a positivist to an interpretative, hermeneutical paradigm of research. The posited emancipatory potential of practice-based research lay in the deliberate attempt to demystify research, to make it more accessible and user-friendly, and enhance its critical power first, by stripping it of its 'theoretical' mystique and second, by breaking down the powerful notion of the researcher as the distanced expert. In this way, research was apparently 'democratised' becoming an activity available to everyone within the relevant field. If research was not to be legitimised by disciplinary criteria then it seemed appropriate that practice should be the source of legitimation i.e. that research should *reflect* practice.

However, problems start to arise when research is understood simply as a 'reflection' of practice. First, research is not a transcendental activity but is itself a practice, a knowledge-claiming and truth-producing practice located in specific research communities. To say that research reflects practice is to imply that research *is* transcendental and consequently to ignore that, as a practice, research acts on or 'constructs' what it researches. The effect is then to mask the way in which 'data', 'knowledge' and 'truth' are generated in the very practice of research.

Second, the very notion of reflection as a measure of legitimation suggests a simple referential and representative relationship between the 'objective', independent world of practice and knowledge of it through research; it's a world that's 'out there', with its 'truth' waiting to be discovered. Interestingly, both the discipline-based and the practice-based paradigms of research are little different in positing accurate representation of a discovered world as the goal of research. In the former, it is discovered through correct use of 'scientific' methodology, in the latter, through the extent to which it reflects practice. In this sense they share the modernist paradigm of ultimately verifiable knowledge as the grounds for personal and social progress. In neither are fundamental questions posed about the nature of representation nor of how truthful representation is *achieved* within particular research practices. It is precisely the notion of truth as a transcendental possibility, of the discovery rather than the *production* of truth, that a postmodern perspective calls into question.

Third, to see research as a reflection of practice is to work with an impoverished and limited conception both of research and of practice. At one level, it is to see the latter as a transparent and readily accessible 'reality' waiting to be discovered and correspondingly, research as necessarily empirical in nature, the justification being that this is the only form of research through which the 'reality' of practice can be truly known. Conceiving practice as transparent and immediately accessible is impoverished because it fails to recognise its complexity. Practice is constructed as a set of experiences and activities *unmediated* by language, discourse and power and thus knowable without the aid of theory. Equally, research is constructed as a linear, staged process without effects, thus without a recognition of the place of con-text (the situatedness of the researcher), pre-text (language, pre-understandings, values) and sub-text (power-knowledge formations expressed through discursive practices). It is only through recognition of the complexity of practice and the 'textuality' of research that the workings of reflexivity can be addressed. Furthermore, it is only through this recognition that there is any possibility of being reflexive both as a practitioner and a researcher. The impoverishment of practice and research is itself a necessary part of a powerful discourse where research is constituted as a species of confessional activity which evokes the 'truth' of practice through reflection but behind which lie other barely concealed yet 'unmentionable' agendas.

It can be argued the power of this conception of research has been engendered by concern over the effectiveness of practice. Since the 1970s, increased accountability has been sought from educators to justify state support for educational practices. There has been a general concern about 'achievement', or the lack of it, and a more particular concern about the failure to substantially transform the class, gender and race profiles of 'achievement'. This has resulted in an ever greater emphasis on the practices of institutions and the effectiveness of individual practitioners. The result has been a greater involvement of government departments (e.g. Employment Department) and government sponsored organizations (e.g. Further Education Unit, NCVQ and TECs/LECs) in investigating the world of educational practice. Ostensibly the agenda has been 'practical' and pragmatic, to 'find out' what works and for those 'lessons' to be made available to the field as a whole. The burgeoning of short term contract research addressing practice-based issues has been one of the consequences.

Much of this research has sought to investigate 'what works' in terms of institutional development and curriculum design. Even if only implicitly, the aim has been to establish how educators can become more effective and efficient. Its limitations have become clear, in particular we will highlight only the limitations inherent in a form of research which seeks to be practice-based yet which has financial questions as a condition and outcome. Yet this enmeshing of financial questions with issues of practitioner efficiency and effectiveness is no coincidence. On the contrary, it provides a vital clue to the way in which any emancipatory intent of practice-based research is capable of being articulated in an oppressive discourse of regulatory control that better enables the disciplining and self-disciplining of educators and educational institutions.

Thus, whilst not wishing to deny that much contract research has had useful outcomes we think it necessary to stress its limitations since these limitations are potentially a feature of all practice-based research. The fundamental problem is that practice-based research has a tendency to be collapsed into a process of evaluating what happens in practice, with the latter defined in terms of the boundaries of particular institutions and educational settings. In this process, the factors which underpin and make that practice possible in the first place are factored out of the research. Research is therefore conducted within a largely descriptive framework of pre-understandings which foreground certain sorts of questions e.g. what we are trying to do? how do we approach it? does it work? From a 'common-sense' viewpoint this appears to be eminently sensible. At the same time, however, since every inclusion is correspondingly an exclusion there is a silence about other kinds of questions, in particular reflexive questions about the 'world' constructed by the research. To create or to work through an already created common-sense world through doing a particular kind of research is to unconsciously and uncritically adopt a certain stance and location. It is to assume that research should be orientated towards the immediately practical, that it should always have instrumental pay-offs and provide 'useful' knowledge and answers to 'real' problems. It is to surrender research to what can be seen as an oppressive technical-rationality. This is somewhat ironic given that practice-based research was originally meant to free research from the constraints of technical-rationality. Practice-based research aims to increase the effectiveness and efficiency. This firmly locates it within a modernist conception of instrumental reason which takes the particular form of finding out what works and then compiling a checklist of 'good practice' which it is assumed can be applied universally. What's at stake here is the possibility of transferral. Paradoxically, it is the very limits of this type of research which undermines transferability and these limits can only be overcome through a critical and reflexive understanding of the wider range of issues that bear upon 'effective practice', including those factors which make 'effective practice' a prime concern of research in the first place. Without this mediation, the empirical overwhelms the critical to such an extent that even 'radical' educational positions are reduced largely to celebrating the failure of initiatives as a 'good thing' without being able to construct credible alternatives. In other words, they become absorbed into the discourses and practices of contract research, even as they oppose what is being researched and are doubtful about their outcomes. The paradigm is sustained and reinforced, despite different and oppositional positions within it.

The privileging of 'practice' as the site for research and the corresponding assumption of the transparency of practice has been reinforced by the popularity of the notion of the 'reflective practitioner' or 'teacher as researcher' and the growth of professional development as its key condition. As well as the democratic impulse, we can detect here a process whereby a general concern over the effectiveness of practice is transferred to the individual practitioner. The effect is to prescriptively construct the practitioner as someone who not only ought to be concerned about the effectiveness of their practice but who is also *solely* responsible for it. Access to an understanding of their practice is to be gained through research into/reflection upon it. While this is now a widely prevalent notion among those concerned with the development of adult educators, it is not uncommon for those same people to comment critically on the largely descriptive, under-analysed and under-theorised nature of 'reflective practice' work. While the criticism is generally levelled at practitioners, it may well be that the very notion of the 'reflective practitioner' that is being worked with, operating as it does within a power-knowledge formation of concern over the effectiveness and efficiency of practice, actually is a contributory factor to the limited response of practitioners. In other words, the notion of the 'reflective practitioner reflecting practice' precisely lacks the sense of context, pre-text and sub-text which creates the possibility for practitioners to more fully and critically interrogate their own practices. It may therefore be more appropriate for professionals to be seen as 'reflexive' practitioners thus suggesting the need for involvement in a process which problematises the very categories of 'practice' and 'concern about practice'.

In conclusion, it is clear that we have only introduced some of the suggestive critiques offered by adopting a postmodern stance. In arguing that 'research reflecting practice' is part of the modern paradigm we are suggesting that it is located within a network of discourses and strategies that construct and regulate 'practice' and the 'practitioner' as key sites and stakes in the operation of power/knowledge formations. Through exploring the postmodern controversies over such issues as 'truth', 'representation' and 'reality' that surround and are silenced by this notion of research we can begin to reveal its powerful effects and question its emancipatory and democratic potential. We are not wanting to claim that practice-based research is 'wrong' or that it should be abandoned. Nor do we seek to prescribe a universally 'right' way of doing research. To do so would be to contradict blatantly the postmodern 'message'. Rather, we are arguing the need for a reflexive recognition of the limits of 'reflecting practice' as a grounding of the claims to truth and knowledge. If research is in the business of constructing 'reality' then one of its important tasks is to be continually demystifying the 'reality' of its own practice. It follows therefore that in foregrounding the workings of reflexivity and the need to be reflexive we have to accept that this text is open to the same challenge. In writing from within a postmodern perspective we recognise that our text is not 'innocent', it is not a mere reflection of an already existing 'reality' but has in effect created, albeit deliberately and self-consciously, yet another 'reality' about research.

Metaphors and their implications for research and practice in adult and community education

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Introduction

TO use a metaphor is to apply a name or descriptive term to something to which it is not literally applicable; the purpose is to provide a new way of seeing something that has become so familiar it is often not seen. Additionally, as Fletcher (1992) notes, the metaphors we use to represent the world to ourselves can act as bridges between our thoughts and our actions. Later, I shall describe the origins of two metaphors for society which help me to make sense of what is going on 'out there' and to make choices about the way I work. I invite you to consider what relevance they may have for your own teaching and research.

First, though, let me introduce you to some turtles, thought patterns and shadowed places. Each also has something to tell us about the familiar, but largely unseen, world in which we live and work.

Turtles

There is an apocryphal story about a meeting between the psychologist, William James, and an old lady who was convinced that the Earth rested on the back of a huge turtle. Politely, James asked what held up the turtle. The lady replied that the first turtle stood on the back of a second. Undaunted, James enquired what held up the second turtle. The withering response was, "Why, surely you know Professor, it's turtles, turtles, turtles, *all the way down*".

Don't laugh too soon! The turtle theory may seem bizarre — but it was undoubtedly arrived at using the same kinds of thought processes as those which have enabled most of us to create a more consensual view of 'the way the world is'. Wilson (1990) provides a simple analysis of these processes. The human mind, he says, behaves as if it were divided into two parts: the Thinker and the Prover. The Thinker is free to fantasize and can create thoughts about almost anything it chooses. The Prover has only one function: to prove what the Thinker thinks.

For the Thinker it is as easy to picture the Earth balanced on the backs of an infinite number of turtles as to visualize it orbiting the Sun. However, the Prover in my mind, and probably yours, is happier to substantiate the latter view for which there seems to be considerably more objective evidence. Secure in our rational thinking, we can smile at the old lady's turtles. We can also brand her as eccentric, dismiss any 'evidence' she may produce to support her theory — and leave unquestioned our own picture of the 'real' world.

I am not suggesting that the next space-probe might actually spot the turtles. Nevertheless, it is only a few hundred years since 'common knowledge', society's collective mindset, decreed that the Earth was flat and dragons lived at the edges. Those who first intimated otherwise, and those who began to dispute other universal 'givens', like the movement of the Sun around the Earth, were branded as mad or as heretics — and risked derision or even death in propounding their views. So I *am* suggesting that, by constricting our thoughts and actions, mindsets have a strong bearing on what we regard as 'reality'.

Mindsets

I referred just now to 'common knowledge' as the collective mindset of a society. Constituting the 'givens' from which further knowledge grows and expands, it represents the ideas we think *with* rather than those we think *about*. Such knowledge is generally held in trust by the society's institutions, a term used here to denote all the organizational structures through which customs and practices are established and upheld, such as families, governments, educational academies, class structures and multinational corporations.

Detailing the importance of such institutions, Douglas (1987) describes how they store and process information, often over many generations, and thereby determine the *mores* of the society in question and influence the thought patterns and behaviour of individuals within it. Even when individuals have some awareness of this influence, most find it extremely difficult to free themselves from it. Indeed, as Fennel *et al* (1988, p.7) point out, 'Sociologists who spend their lives trying to demystify society find that its immense present reality distorts their vision constantly'.

For Douglas (*op.cit.*, p.69) the process of 'demystifying' society is problematic because institutions 'create shadowed places in which nothing can be seen and no questions asked'. Thus, by storing and processing the information which bounds our society, institutions both have an impact on and *act like* the unconscious part of our own minds. An analogy might be with a sponge which is able to absorb, and therefore to exclude from awareness, information which is superfluous to our immediate circumstances or which might be distressing. This selective exclusion of unwanted information is what enables us, as individuals as well as whole societies, to create our own 'reality'. Two examples may help here:

First, what has your 'reality' been over the past five minutes? Have you been focusing on what has been said? Were you also aware of other impressions? Had you got bored and 'gone' somewhere else? Is it not the case that where we focus our attention is all that is 'real' for us — our 'reality' — at any given time? Think about occasions when someone has spoken and startled you because you were, literally, 'lost in thought'!

Second, as in random blot tests where the visual stimuli remain the same but the 'pictures' people create from them vary considerably, what we 'see' in everyday situations — and believe to be 'reality' — varies from person to person. Shown a glass in which the contents were at the halfway mark would you say it was half full — or half empty?

The difference is not merely semantic: your answer probably represents your whole outlook on life! Such responses often stem from mindsets that have less to do with the present than with thought patterns and expectations laid down in the past as a result of personal experiences. Such experiences are themselves shaped and coloured by an institutional framework of which, for the most part, we are only vaguely aware.

Metaphors

In the remainder of this paper I want to explore, through the use of metaphor, the 'reality' created by the knowledge held in, and processed by, the institutions of Western industrialized societies — and to consider some of the implications of an alternative 'reality'.

I should warn you that these metaphors have become my turtles! My Prover has satisfied me they are valid ways of seeing the world. Yours may not. In either event, check your mindsets: they may seriously influence the reality you choose!

The two metaphors are of a giant machine and of *Gaia*. The first symbolizes for me the way in which Western industrialized societies presently operate; the second holds promise for the future.

The machine metaphor originates from Toffler's (1980) view that industrial societies in the West are approaching the end of a period of civilization characterized by thought and behaviour patterns associated with the Industrial Revolution. Founded on a Newtonian vision of a 'clockwork universe', such societies have themselves become machines and people no more than the cogs to drive and serve them. The success of these 'Society Machines' has been measured in terms of their economic and political power, and their education systems designed to perpetuate the efficient operation of the machinery.

The information stored and processed by the institutions in such societies has been affected by mindsets born of the artificial separation of the physical from the spiritual world which seems to have been the necessary precursor of the advancement of modern science. One feature of 'scientific thought' often reflected in the structure of industrial societies is the importance attributed to classificatory systems, leading to separation and hierarchical ordering (in education, for example, in terms of age bands and abilities; in industry, between 'blue and white collar' work; and, of course, by gender and race).

Influenced by such thinking, the people-cogs of 'Society Machines' frequently define themselves in terms of their position in the Machine. They say "I am a teacher" or "I am a miner" or "I am a housewife" as if their whole 'I', their whole 'being-ness' were invested in their Machine function. It is one reason why redundancy, or even enforced changes in established work patterns, can be so devastating, and why women whose full-time career has been in caring for their family sometimes find it so difficult to cope when grown-up children leave home: suddenly it is not clear who 'I' am.

Western 'Society Machines' now show signs of instability: many 'cogs' no longer have a clearly defined function; others have tried to redefine their function and/or their traditional relationship with other Machine parts. The institutions that have sustained the Machine are beginning to crumble and some of the 'givens' hidden in their shadows are being exposed to question. In Kuhn's (1970) terms, we may be experiencing a 'paradigm shift', a period in which there are too many anomalies to be absorbed within the existing paradigm and a new one must emerge. The Gaia metaphor is increasingly being used to give substance to the emerging paradigm (see Russell, 1991; Thompson, 1987).

The concept of *Gaia* was developed by Lovelock (1979) who proposed that the Earth is a living system. Other scientists dispute this, but the powerful imagery created by attaching the name of the ancient Earth goddess to a modern scientific theory now provides a means of articulating the need for a re-examination, from a global perspective, of societal value systems. Underpinning this need is a tacit acknowledgement of the organic nature and interconnectedness of socio-political, physical and spiritual processes.

This acknowledgement derives, in part, from the workings of quantum physics rather than Newtonian mechanics. The difference is particularly relevant in the present context since a central tenet of the new physics is that the researcher and 'the researched' are inseparable. So, also, must be the teacher and 'the taught', in the sense of both subject matter and students.

For me, using *Gaia* as a metaphor for society both highlights the nature of such relationships and draws attention to the need for an education system that enables individuals to search for their own meaning, to answer the question "Who am I?", unfettered by artificially imposed institutional boundaries or expectations. The key to this system may lie in the development of practitioner research, particularly in the field of adult and community education. Significantly, such research can enhance both the personal growth and development of the researcher through the process of reflection, and the social awareness and understanding of the research 'subjects' through their conscious and active involvement in the investigative process.

At a time when the status of practitioner research is not yet fully recognised in academic circles, that of adult and community education still not entirely clear within the universities, and government intervention in education increasingly reactionary, such a notion may seem incongruous. However, it is born of an image created by the juxtaposition of the two metaphors I have described. This image has 'Society Machine' ideologies represented by a vast wave in the ocean which has reached its peak and begun to disintegrate; Gaian thought patterns and processes are giving shape to the new wave which must follow. I may be alone in this ocean on the back of my turtle — but the 'reality' encapsulated by the new wave looks attractive. Will you join me there?

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A 'common-sense' approach to reflection

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Introduction

THE aim of this paper is to explore some ideas about reflection which came out of research into Egan's 'Helping Model'. It may be helpful for the reader to be aware that in the field of counsellor training, Egan's 'Helping Model' (Egan, 1975) is looked upon as a framework within which communication skills training can be integrated into helping relationships. The 'Helping Model' is person-centred and focuses on missed opportunity and possible potential arising from missed opportunity. A basic characteristic of the model is that it is structured into three stages of development as exemplified in Figure 1.

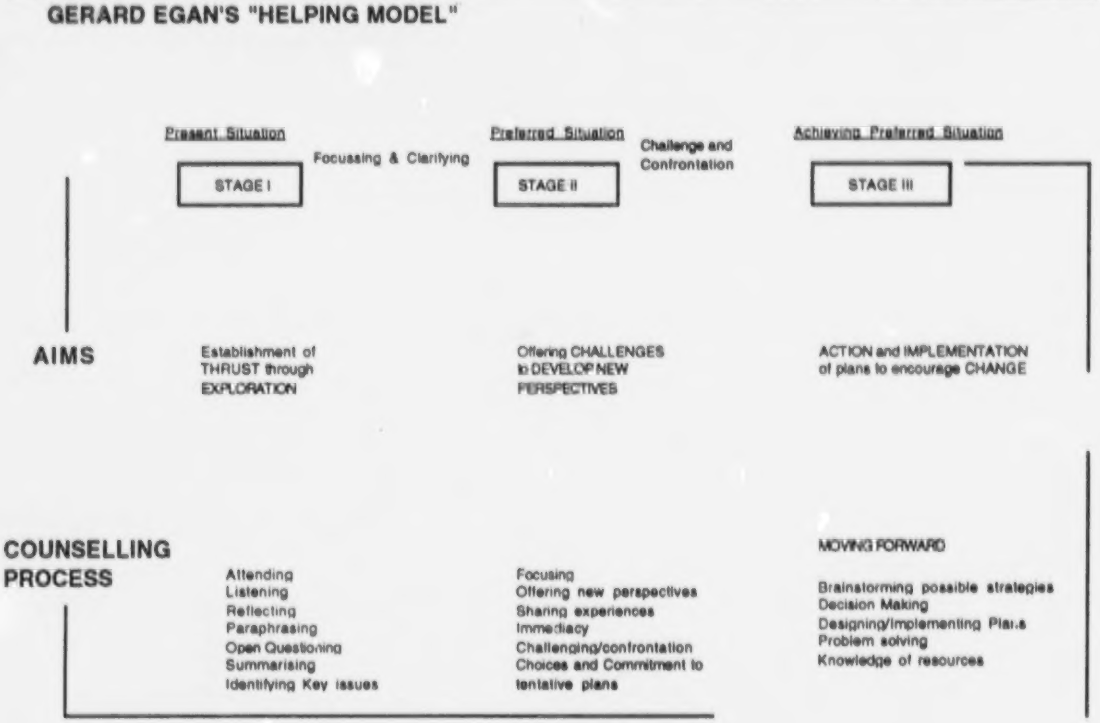
GERARD EGAN'S "HELPING MODEL"
Present Situation
Focussing & Clarifying
Preferred Situation
Challenge and Confrontation
Achieving Preferred Situation
STAGE I
STAGE II
STAGE III
AIMS
Establishment of THRUST through EXPLORATION
Offering CHALLENGES to DEVELOP NEW PERSPECTIVES
ACTION and IMPLEMENTATION of plans to encourage CHANGE
COUNSELLING PROCESS
Attending
Listening
Reflecting
Paraphrasing
Open Questioning
Summarising
Identifying Key issues
Focusing
Offering new perspectives
Sharing experiences
Immediacy
Challenging/confrontation
Choices and Commitment to tentative plans
MOVING FORWARD
Brainstorming possible strategies
Decision Making
Designing/Implementing Plans
Problem solving
Knowledge of resources

FIGURE 1

I have used Egan's 'Helping Model' for approximately eight years, both in the classroom and in staff development workshops for teachers. One of the main findings from this experience is that the 'Helping Model' gives people who use it a sense of personal meaning and ownership in their work once a trusting and caring relationship has been established. During 1987-90 Iused the dynamics of Egan's 'Helping Model' to underpin a research project into Recording of Achievement (FEU Project No RP 458) and it was subsequently discovered that the dynamics of reflection derived from the FEU study could be applied to implement change within an organisational setting. This in itself was not a new discovery — Egan has applied his 'Helping Model' to organisational development (Egan, 1985 & 1988). What was new was the realisation of the power of the dynamics embedded within the structure of the 'Helping Model' — I considered these dynamics to be very significant and useful for the development of a simple and active approach to reflection. It was from this background that I began to research into the origins of Egan's 'Helping Model'.

The hidden process embedded within the dynamics of Egan's 'Helping Model' was adapted into a simple reflective model which was then applied to curriculum change within an organisational setting. (Russon 1991). The dynamics of the reflection seemed to be derived from counsellor qualities of trust, openness, honesty, non-judgemental warmth and empathy. With this discovery, it became apparent that the hidden process discovered within Egan's 'Helping Model' could be applied to many situations as a reflective activity, simply by sharing thoughts and feelings with others within the context of trusting and caring relationships, provided an agreed contract of confidentiality was established. It was also found that greater emphasis on the process of reflection diminished the 'mystique' surrounding counselling and counsellor training.

Origins of Egan's 'Helping Model'

Egan states in 'The Skilled Helper' (1975) that he derived the structure of his 'Helping Model' from a collection of different ideas and aspects of counselling and psychological theory which he then applied to a simple, 'common-sense folk model' comprising three stages of development. Egan explains in the preface to 'The Skilled Helper' (1975) that he was first introduced to this 'folk model' at High School, and he describes the model first presented to him as 'To See, to Judge, and then to Act. The 'Helping Model' Egan devised from this knowledge and experience is exemplified in Figure 2.

FIGURE 2: COMMON SENSE METHOD OF REFLECTION

Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3
Beginning	**Middle**	**End**
TO SEE	TO JUDGE	TO ACT

The literature search I carried out seems to reveal that the structure and process of Egan's 'Helping Model' can be traced to the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius of Loyola. St Ignatius wrote his Spiritual Exercises not for people to read about, but rather, for them to practice (Brodnick, 1940). Gerard Hughes (1985) maintains that Ignatius wrote the Spiritual Exercises for 'everyone'. Ignatian Spirituality involves a process of reflection on feelings and individual personal impulses in order to enhance the decision-making process within spiritual direction (King, 1975). A comparison of the processes which underpin Ignatian Spiritual Direction and Egan's 'Helping Model' is exemplifed in Figure 3.

I would seek to encourage an examination of closed, prejudiced attitudes to folk, cultural and religious literature sources in order that such sources are accepted in academic circles with more objectivity, because there is a tendency to become trapped into a purely 'intellectual' approach to research that can become meaningless and complicated when applied to practical situations. It is helpful to be aware of personal as well as academic and scientific prejudice; and to examine 'closed' attitudes which could prevent research into what might on the surface appear to be subjective and unproductive routes of enquiry.

FIGURE 3: COMPARISON OF IGNATIAN SPIRITUAL DIRECTION AND EGAN'S "HELPING MODEL"

IGNATIAN SPIRITUAL DIRECTION	EGAN'S HELPING MODEL
Stage 1	Stage 1
Aim: Who am I?	Aim: review of current situation
(a) Focusing on the current problem	(a) Telling the story
(b) Re-living the experience	(b) Clarifying/focusing
(c) Getting in touch with feelings about the experience	(c) Summarising
(d) Identifying negative and positive aspects of the experience	(d) Finding new perspectives
Stage 2	*Stage 2*
Aim: Imagining what I could achieve	Aim: Imagining the preferred situation
(a) Focusing on the Ideal Situation.	(a) Describing the new or preferred situation
(b) Turning negative experiences into positive aims for the future.	(b) Identifying clear and specific goals
(c) Identifying the course of action.	(c) Making a decision to change and identifying an aim
Stage 3	*Stage 3*
Aim: Strategyand implementation	Aim: Strategy and implementation
(a) Planning the strategy possibilities	(a) Brainstorming
(b) Considering all possible alternatives.	(b) Formulating a plan
(c) Writing out the strategy.	(d) Identifying action to be taken.

With simple acceptance of what Ignatian spirituality might have to offer, it becomes apparent that Ignatius of Loyola has provided us with particular ways of understanding and deepening our human experience that are wholly in accord with the best insights of modern psychology. (Meissner, 1992 and Meadow 1989). Ignatius found a way — through his own personal way of reflecting — of getting in touch with his inner-most thoughts and feelings and sharing these thoughts and feelings with his companions. After sifting through the meaning of his feelings, Ignatius was able to make decisions that changed the course of his life and the course of the counter-reformation during the Sixteenth Century. What I have found fascinating is that when Ignatian reflective processes are applied to every-day situations, we are enabled to let go of established uncertainties and are given a sense of direction that is underpinned by commitment derived from a sense of truth and integrity. These qualities lie at the heart of any situation in life, but are often ignored. In this context, weakness and vulnerability become essential ingredients leading to trust, growth and greater self-confidence (English, 1987). In order to understand how Ignatius of Loyola discovered this for himself and then devised his own system of coping with change in his own life and transferring this to the challenge of change during the 16th Century (Rahner 1979), it is necessary to reflect briefly on his life and experience in the context of his time.

Brief biographical sketch of Ignatius of Loyola

Ignatius of Loyola was born in 1491 at the family castle of Loyola in the Basque country. The family belonged to provincial nobility whose members had fought with the Kings of Castile since the 13th Century. The traditions of soldiering, characteristic of his family, permeated Ignatius' strong sense of duty, obedience and high-minded chivalry. In 1521 his leg was shattered by a cannon ball whilst in battle at Pamplona, Northern Spain, and he was carried back to Loyola on a stretcher. His leg was re-set twice and as he began to recover he began to reflect on his life. The battle of Pamplona against a trained foreign foe was Ignatius' only chance to win the martial glory that had so long eluded him (English, 1987). In reflecting on the Pamplona experience, Ignatius compared his daydreams with the reality of his life — that of becoming a cripple. What was he to do now? This brought him in touch with his feelings, he was bored and frustrated and felt a very deep sense of sadness at the loss of being a professional soldier. As he grieved, he began to ask himself questions; "Who am I?" "What will I do?" "What is the challenge in my life?" "What is happening to me?" "Where am I going?" (Hewett 1990). This type of self-questioning lies at the heart of the spiritual experience, and is completely transferrable to existentialism and phenomenology.

The three stages of Egan's 'folk model' seem to correlate to the type of questions Ignatius asked himself as he thought through the direction his life should follow.

The essential message that threads its way through the processes exemplified in Figure 4 is an awareness of feelings at each stage of development and an ability to look at the difficulties confronting one in life to discover ways of overcoming problems. The genius of Ignatius lies in the kind of reflection that got him in touch with his feelings and sub-conscious through his own self-questioning.

FIGURE 4: IGNATIAN METHOD OF REFLECTION

Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3
Beginning	Middle	End
Who am I?	Where am I going?	How will I achieve my goal?
What is the challenge in my life?	What will I do?	What is happening to me?

Reflection as a decision-making process

The main use of reflection in the Spiritual Exercises was to make decisions, and the central theme of this decision-making process was one of choice and hope (King,1975). Ignatius called this process discernment and he discovered and clarified the techniques of decision-making by reflecting upon and then journaling his spiritual experiences. He was able to share his ideas with his companions and to show them too how to keep a spiritual journal. Through this process his companions were able to choose between negative and positive impulses and to make decisions focused on the truth of individual situations. The whole point of keeping a journal was to focus on feelings related to a life experience or a specific task, and the techniques of sifting through daily experiences, noting opposing feelings (e.g. sadness as opposed to happiness) enabled the companions of Ignatius to focus on the 'truth' of particular situations. The discernment process seems to be aligned to the phenomenological reduction theory of Edmund Husserl. The advantage of the discernment process when applied to phenomenology, is that the 'lived' experience always belongs to and is never taken away from the person who is experiencing and reflecting. Clarification of meaning in the search of 'truth' is achieved by sharing and clarifying thoughts, feelings, dreams and fantasies with another person experienced in the techniques of discernment. The techniques of sifting through negative and positive feelings in the discernment process whilst very simple, are also very challenging — but the person is left completely free to explain and clarify his/her own experiences without the fear of inaccurate interpretation. In comparison, the phenomenological reduction theory of Edmund Husserl (Hycner, 1985), appears to me to be intellectual, clumsy, and distanced from the context of a personally 'owned' experience

The process of discernment

There is widespread suspicion of the notion of Ignatian discernment, and King (1975) asserts that a sense of altrusim is fundamental to effective decision-making with clear goals and total commitment to the achievement of these goals for the process to be implemented properly. Proper use of the techniques of Ignatian decision-making involves the qualities of indifference, detatchment to self-interest and a single-minded commitment to the achievement of a goal. If self-interest is given top priority in the decision-making process, there is reluctance on the part of the individual to enter into any dialogue that might question his/her raison d'etre (King, 1975). Discernment is therefore a process of self-discipline and challenge, requiring the ability to detatch oneself from one's personal ambitions, prejudices and values. Such single-mindedness is not the normal attitude of human beings, for it is quite natural to be interested in 'self'. The journaling process, supervised by an experienced helper, enables exploration and clarification with complete confidentiality.

A case study implementing the dynamics of reflection based on Ignatian philosophy revealed that teachers gained greater awareness of personal meaning and fulfilment in their work and this enabled team members to be more open with each other. It was felt by the team members that they needed a facilitator unconnected with the team with whom they could clarify their ideas individually, under a strict code of confidentiality. It is remarkable that when trust, respect and genuiness are observed, the Ignatian decision-making process seems to be completely transferable to educational aims and objectives.

In applying the process to an educational setting there must be clear goals and a sense of direction. The following criteria is essential, and could be agreed and 'contracted' by applying the Ignatian processes described in this paper:

FIGURE 5: ESSENTIAL CRITERIA FOR IMPLEMENTING REFLECTION

1. Clear goals/aims.

2. Single-minded commitment to the achievement of goals/aims.

3. Autonomy of each individual acknowledged and respected.

4. Commitment to reflection for effective decision-making in the achievement of the goals.

5. Awareness and evaluation of social, psychological and physical factors that could inhibit the achievement of the goal.

6. Awareness of influences that could promote freedom and autonomy in the achievement of the goal.

In order to achieve these aims, it is essential that the reflective process is facilitated by a person who is experienced in using Ignatian techniques and principles. Each person using the process should be altruistically commited to the notion of reflective decision-making in the context of service to others and the cause of education.

Conclusion

It is not possible adequately to describe the processes of Ignatian spirituality, because they are at the same time dynamic and esoteric — and have to be experienced to be understood. The essence of Ignatian discernment is that it has to be practiced and lived through. I have approached research in this area by applying Ignatian principles to educational issues by putting the principles into practice and allowing people to discover the power of the dynamics of a 'common-sense' approach to reflection. Conducting research in this area has not been easy, it has been lonely — because it was not possible to share the ideas completely for of fear of rejection of a 'religious' philosophy. However, I asked the following question of team leaders who had been involved in my study

> "If I had told you at the beginning of this study that the reflective model I was using was taken from theological or religious origins, would you have been prepared to work with me?"

In each case, the answer was an unequivocal "No!" — accompanied with a sense of disbelief at what had been accomplished through the use of such a model. What was encouraging was that the team leaders seemd to want to learn more about the model and its origins.

For me, the greatest benefit of the application of Ignatian philosophy to a 'common-sense' approach to reflection is that it harnesses the creativity of human potential to the achievement of personal and organisational goals. The best example of the success of this 'common-sense' approach is Ignatius' own personal story and how the dynamics of his philosophy under-pinned the Counter Reformation in Europe and the subsequent success of Jesuit Education world-wide (Characteristics, 1987). If we take time to reflect on these facts, we may discover parallels between the Renaissance and Reformation of 16th Century Europe and the state of the British Education System in the 20th Century. Indeed, in my opinion, the British education system seems to have lost its sense of direction and purpose. The aims of education, the role of education service, the professional autonomy of teachers, and the role of assessment in the learning process are constantly questioned. It seems to me that the British education service would do well to learn from Ignatius of Loyola by asking a few simple questions and then reflecting deeply upon them in the context of Ignatian discernment: "What is happening?" "Where are we going?" "What are our aims?" "How will we achieve these aims?"

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Generating knowledge in practice: challenging the assumptions

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Introduction

THE tension between scientific and clinically oriented discourses, described by Bergmark and Oscarsson (1992), originated from the failure of both to pay heed to the essential differences between phenomenological and more 'objective' data, and to make their analytical limits explicit. The scientific tradition, with few exceptions, gives priority to objective data with the result that the object of study is viewed as a fraction of its composite whole.

Objectivist/scientific research fails to reflect upon the differences between its theoretical model of an object and the object itself, ignoring both the objectivity and reality of subjective experiences (Bergmark & Oscarsson, 1992). For this reason, the knowledge generated may have little impact or meaning for practitioners within the context of their day to day work.

This paper presents a description of a curriculum innovation in which the pivotal point rests upon learning through practice based enquiry. The authors reflect upon the impact of positivism and professionalism on midwifery knowledge. The innovation described adopts the 'person as scientist' metaphor within a model of education which conceives knowledge as a construction of reality rather than an accumulation of facts (Pope & Denicolo 1986;163-4). The curriculum challenges the separation of theory and practice and provides an alternative approach to practice, education and continuing learning. A brief analysis of the impact of the organisational environment upon the practise of individuals concludes in a recommendation for a 'learning company' ethos (Ross, 1992), that has the power to achieve continuing transformation within a rapidly changing world.

Positivism and professionalism in a post-modern world[1]

Schön (1988) describes the heritage of Positivism, the powerful philosophical doctrine that evolved in the 19th century, as the rise of science and technology and a social movement aimed at applying the achievements of these to the well-being of humanity. Predating Schön, Inge (1927) postulates conflict between naturalism and supernaturalism. He uses Leslie Stephen's analysis of the two spheres of realities and dreams to epitomise the division of science (mechanical physics) and the mind (consciousness). The former was considered effective whilst the latter was relegated to the position of a passive spectator among machinery that worked independently of it.

Professional knowledge has traditionally arisen out a combination of myth and science. However, as the professions developed, professional education sought to obliterate myth from the curriculum by adopting the technical rationality model. 'Science' was, and still is, considered to be influential in increasing the status of professions (English, 1993:387), the assumption being that empirical research is the only valid form of knowledge generation.

Historically, midwifery was seduced by the prospect of medical recognition and so was invaded and overwhelmed by medical science. At the same time the profession was held prisoner within a bureaucratic hierarchy which forced practitioners to defend their actions by conforming to scientific forms of measurement that bureaucracy would understand, with the result of a loss of professional identity and intuitive autonomy.

The rediscovery of professional artistry

Schön (1988:69) promotes the search for an epistemology of practice implicit in the artistic, intuitive process that some practitioners do bring to situations of uncertainty, instability, uniqueness and value conflict. He is describing 'reflection-in-action'. It is now timely to rediscover professional artistry and recognise that enquiry into this form of practice is in itself a scientific process. The process of rediscovery requires, according to Bourdieu (1989:18) identification of social, cultural and structural constructions and construction of a break with the primary knowledge of the familiar world using an 'objective' approach such as critical reflectivity. However, analysis of a given situation must not stop there, for as Bourdieu (1977:3), explains 'the limits of the objective and objectifying standpoint ... grasp practice from outside as a *fait accompli*'. Therefore it is necessary to delve constantly deeper into practice to produce and reproduce knowledge.

Knowledge and professional education

Professional education exists on the knife-edge of change, balancing between the ideology of certainty and the reality of uncertainty. This paradox places professional education with one foot in the world of technical rationality and modernity[2] and the other tentatively in the rapidly changing world of the post-modern era that challenges assumptions of certainty and objective science as being instrumental in achieving stability. The resultant impact is one in which practitioners have to wrestle with the phenomenon of the obsolescence of knowledge.

A number of educational institutions have attempted to grapple with this problem but there is a danger that the current emphasis on 'reflection' and 'facilitative' technique in professional education and practice is more rhetoric than reality. Dominant educational processes continue to reinforce passivity in learning. This is evident within both initial and continuing professional education that is conducted as a content led approach. This reflects Todd's (1984:89-104) thinking concerning a 'closed strategy'. He describes a phenomenon of 'new content' being itself out of date so that this leads to a continuously repeated cycle of updating and slipping out of date and yet more updating. It is important therefore, to focus on continuing learning in the practice arena with the practitioner generating knowledge at source.

Such knowledge will have meaning within the context of the individual practitioner's own practice. However, we must guard against the privatisation of that knowledge. Traditionally, practitioners have guarded their personal knowledge fearing public scepticism. This has resulted in a lack of awareness about and understanding of knowledge generated through practice.

In professional education, theory precedes practice that perpetuates the notion of the supremacy of this epistemological viewpoint. In turn, this leads to a view of professional knowledge as a hierarchy in which general principles occupy the highest level and concrete problem-solving the lowest (Schein, 1973). The order of application of theoretical knowledge is also an order of derivation and dependence. As one would expect from the hierarchical model of professional knowledge, research is institutionally separate from practice, connected to it by carefully defined relationships of exchange.

Research, practitioner-researcher and the researched

Traditionally, researchers are expected to provide the basic and applied science from which to derive techniques for diagnosis and solving the problems of practice. Practitioners are expected to furnish researchers with problems for study and evidence of the utility and relevance of research results. The researcher's role is distinct from, and usually considered superior to, the role of the practitioner. Within the midwifery context, there is an increasing demand for 'research midwives'; however, it is argued here that far from establishing research credibility studies conducted in a traditional approach may merely replicate the failures of past research actitivies.

Winter (1989, p65) challenges the claims of detached researchers speaking from their objective viewpoint as being frequently greeted by practitioners with incredulity, boredom or mockery and cites the following quip *(Times Educational Supplement):* 'Research either tells you something you knew already, or tells you nothing, or tells you something that is obviously nonsense' (Sloman 1980). Despite the infiltration of empirical research data into education and the profession at the 'highest' levels, there is evidence that research has failed to reach those who are clinically based (Moores 1984).

Each practitioner needs to become a researcher in their own situation, engaging in a reflexive and dialectical critique about practice experience with the intention of generating new theory. The dominant interpretation of reflection as personal, private and individual is criticised by Kemmis (1985) who argues that reflection is normally seen as a purely cognitive process. Because of this, there has been a failure to recognise that it is a situated interplay of thought, feeling and action concerned with examining and changing knowledge. How then are practitioners to be prepared for their role as researcher?

Generating knowledge through practice: a midwifery curriculum innovation

A work-based modular curriculum for practising midwives was developed to empower them to engage in human inquiry within the practice arena. The nature of human enquiry demands that the researcher, i.e. the midwife, engages in an interactive process with the researched, e.g. other midwives and clients, thus becoming both co-researcher and co-subject in meaning-seeking dialogue (Reason & Rowan 1991).

As practitioners begin to delve deeper into practice and engage in learning conversations with colleagues and clients, they will become aware of the need for an in-depth understanding of their own and other's worlds. They will come to recognise the changing nature of practice and appreciate implications of the compression of time and space that results in the obsolescence of knowledge. The emphasis of curriculum design, therefore, is placed on work-based learning that affords opportunities for contextually meaningful experiences.

The role of the midwifery educationalists is crucial in the stimulation of critical thought; therefore it is essential that they become actively involved in the exploration of practice and participate in the research process, becoming both co-researcher and co-subject.

The purpose of this approach is to avoid the danger of adopting methods such as facilitation and experiential approaches that may disguise instrumentalism with a 'human face' (Usher, 1992:212). The emphasis on methods and techniques reinforces the notion of theoretical supremacy because of the decontextualised nature of the approaches. Usher maintains that we need a critical scepticism and a suitable degree of uncertainty whilst paying close attention to the need for a careful deconstruction of theory that arises through practice, theory that arises about practice; and the discourses that surround practice, recognising that nothing should be taken for granted. Certainty cannot be assured within the rapidly changing world in which practice is located.

Teaching and learning in an organisational context

Jarvis (1992:246) points out that practitioners as learners may encounter a disabling dissonance on return to a structured environment in which inertia reigns supreme. This may be that those in power do not wish things to change, or because others within the situation prefer the status quo. In these situations the teaching and learning transaction may produce little change as the learners are often rewarded for ritualistic and repetitive behaviour whilst experimentation and creativity may be actively discouraged.

The notion of the learning organisation is important here, and particularly so in the context of this curriculum innovation. Organisations learn, according to Argyris and Schön (1978), through the agency of individuals working within them, and that individual learning is a necessary but insufficient condition for organisational change.

If practice is fundamentally, and not cosmetically, to change, then the organisation will need to adopt a learning ethos. Members acting as learning agents for responding to changes to the internal and external environment will effect a process of continuing transformation (Pedler, Burgoyne & Boydell 1991).

Conclusion

The authors challenge the assumptions about the appropriateness of traditional research that have evolved from the positivist philosophy in the context of a post-modern society. It is argued that theory and practice are not two distinct entities but are two interactive, interdependent and complimentary phases of the learning process. They do not confront one another across an unbridgeable gulf; each contains elements of one another (Winter 1989: 66). Therefore, it is appropriate to take a fresh look at the definition of the researcher and the approaches utilised to prepare them to engage in the process of knowledge generation.

This curriculum innovation has been developed within the context of a higher education institution to counteract the separation of theory and practice. Education has, in fact, returned to the practice arena to stimulate meaningful learning and to generate knowledge. In recognition of the need for empirical evaluation, the project has been designed as an action research. Results will be published subsequently.

Finally, it is recognised that critical enquiry is itself a paradox. It seeks to deconstruct knowledge by generating questions and causing uncertainty whilst searching for certainty. Therefore, it must not be regarded as an educational panacea. However, out of the ashes of uncertainty new understanding of reality emerge which will allow practitioners to keep pace with the changing world.

FOOTNOTES

[1] The post-modern world is characterised by fragmentation, ephemerality and the chaotic currents of change (Harvey 1992: 44). Foucault (1984) would argue that the development of action, thought and desires by proliferation and disjunction is an inherent feature of this era. Turner (1990:1) claims that there can be an important alliance between progressive politics (in gender issues, multicultural alternatives to racism, in ecology movements and cultural criticism) and postmodernism.

[2] Modernity is characterised by the rapid growth of technology, science and industry, supporting an ever powerful capitalist structure (Lash & Urry 1991).

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Taking the epistemology: what happened to that discreet object of knowledge?

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RECOILING from the cackle of acronyms that constitutes the field of current adult educational policy, the researcher, when asked to reflect on her activities, glances up only to find herself in a hall of distorting mirrors.

Introduction

This paper reflects on some issues concerning the object of research in adult continuing education, and on the coverage of the term Adult Education. What does the regular alteration of title of the subject area signify: changes in practices, 'client-group', ideological perspective, professionalisation or some more subtle change of emphasis? The paper suggests that the object of knowledge studied under the term dissolves into different discursive fields from which the attempt to extract the original object may do it some violence. So much for Reflection Theory.

Whereas internal university departments are the product of mostly nineteenth century specialised divisions of knowledge, a department of Adult continuing education has no such body of knowledge or discreet methods of enquiry. Since we teach a range of subject specialisms in different circumstances to 'non-traditional' students, our research concerns are less focused. Instead we promiscuously range over pedagogical, historical, political, psychological and practical issues. The formation 'Adult Education' however, has in the post-war period occupied an institutional space recognised in a number of ways, for example for funding, staffing, provision, research and so on. In the last decade or so it has slipped almost imperceptibly into 'Continuing Education' which has a significantly different agenda. New pressures suggest it might be fragmenting further into mainstream higher education on the one hand and into the space occupied by Further Education on the other.

Autobiography

When I first began to take research into adult education seriously I had already been a WEA Tutor Organiser for ten years. Until that point I had, I think, not really considered it a respectable field of study. Indeed I (and much of the class of '68: Fieldhouse, forthcoming) came into the WEA more as a political activist with an agenda for cultural struggle on the lines of Gramsci's 'war of manoeuvre', the point of which, as I saw it then in the unpleasantly masculinist language of the time, was prising open the cracks in the hegemony and filling them with critical theory and hedonism. The WEA was a space which allowed me to teach my core interests of literature and politics in evening classes and Fresh Start courses while organising and teaching courses on health and safety to safety reps for the TUC. It was very heaven. With the safety reps, for example, we could quite legitimately discuss the relationship of safety committees to Gramsci's workers' councils and the transition from the economico-corporative, which positioned the workers as wage-slaves, to the ground of the ethico-political which saw the workers as producers, though this was probably not what Michael Foot had envisaged when he passed his Health and Safety legislation. Mrs Thatcher of course put an end to all that with the rather radical solution to health and safety problems of closing down the manufacturing sector. Anyway in these New Times, I suppose this now seems rather utopian. Only when the inevitable rows with the WEA district began to develop into a 'war of attrition' (curiously not a war covered well by Saint Antonio) and some of us found our jobs were on the line, did I seriously begin to investigate where the WEA was coming from.

The key word was 'tradition'. Our opponents in the WEA claimed that trade-union teaching was not traditional since it did not use the methods of liberal studies and was moreover narrowly class-based. Worse, it claimed an excessive proportion of WEA funding was used for 'workers' education', whereas the WEA should be a general provider of liberal education. Like many people I had naïvely assumed when I joined the WEA (having spent four years teaching part-time in FE and prisons) that having 'Workers' in its title reflected a special orientation to that class of people. So much for Reflection Theory.

Since leaving the WEA (we couldn't settle our differences) and becoming a jobbing researcher, I have had the good fortune to be employed to look at 'adult education' both historically and globally. Under investigation of course, the object disappears and its places are occupied by a variety of paradigms, ideologies and institutional apparatuses which support a range of widely different practices, methodological assumptions and bodies of knowledge. This could of course simply be family resemblance in that there is usually some degree of overlap or shared features, however the overlap reaches into other areas of education, politics, social policy, welfare and a range of other practices rendering it increasingly hard to distinguish the discreet object from the broader field. This of course is old ground, well-tilled by AE speculators over the years, but I want to suggest that it is precisely this catholicity of interest and method that opens up new areas and constructs new objects of research.

Professing adult education

Much of the research interest in Adult Education is in its development since it entered the process of professionalisation and could thus be inscribed into histories of institutions, that is, when it could safely be detached from its social history context as Mechanics' Institute, or Corresponding Society or reading circle with their dangerously 'amateur' status (with perhaps University Extension as a foundational moment of the profession). However, 'University Extension' offers a very important example of the selective construction of the subject. While viewed from its contemporary British perspectives it had a clear purpose, known institutional bases, personnel and protocols along with a discursive structure, developed publicly in its journals, from continental Europe it was not so simple. 'University Extension' spread rapidly throughout Europe in the 1890s but the actual practices and institutions covered by the name varied widely. It became attached to a range from already established societies for Scientific Education, through popular lecture series run from universities and civic education societies sponsored by municipalities to nationalist and socialist workers' educational groups. European extension was often inseparable in fact from the broader nationalist and socialist movements associated with 'modernity' and the Enlightenment movement.

Moreover, a number of French and Dutch academics were highly sceptical about British extension. In what was to become one of those examples of 'eternal recurrence', they argued that the education of adults was not legitimately university work (since it was well-known adults could not learn and university standards would fall) (Marriott, 1987) . On the contrary it was merely a poor substitute for an imperfect system of secondary education (such as, of course, France and Holland possessed). The French therefore were reluctant to sponsor university extension and in return were rewarded with the *Universités Populaires*, which had no formal contact with universities at all but which sprung up more or less spontaneously (with a helping hand from freemasonry and Leon Bourgeois's Radical Party).

Workers' education

The founding of the WEA in Britain in 1903 shifted the paradigm markedly away from that of extension, and may have been inspired by the French example of the UPs. Although it claimed continuity with extension through the link with the universities, it now aspired to be an association for the higher education of working men and invented the three year tutorial as its instrument. This was altogether a more serious educational and political ambition than extension and shifted the centre of gravity to the democratic organisations of 'students' (not then to be confused with 'consumers'), who were mostly trade-union activists, co-operators and schoolteachers. This was conceived as 'workers' rather than 'adult' education, whose end was 'the social emancipation of the working-class'. Shortly, after the Ruskin Strike of 1909, came the announcement of 'Independent Workers' Education' which intensified the emphasis but the Plebs League with its slogan 'Educate, Agitate, Organise' abjured the university link and attempted to create its own organic intellectuals. 'Workers' Education' was therefore only contingently adult education in the sense that adults came to its classes and not so by definition (unless one defines workers as adults, which is clearly not the case, otherwise there could not be child-labour). This lack of discrimination prompted G.D.H. Cole in the late 1940s to declare that he was 'not damn well interested' in adult education but only in workers' education (Williams 1979, p. 80 , Cole 1952). Workers' Education, therefore, could be said to form a different discursive field to Adult Education and while some terminology is undoubtedly shared, should not automatically be subsumed in it.

Post-colonial movements

Third World education offers similar examples of difference. In many post-colonial countries adult education is almost identical with social policy. For example in post-Independence India, the nationalist government of Nehru introduced the policy of Social Education as part of the programme of industrial modernisation. Although it was conceived as having a broadly socialist-humanist curriculum the various five year plans in fact centred on literacy work. Moreover, while in public, lip-service was paid to Gandhi's Wardha Scheme for 'Basic Education', a village craft-centred education, it was in practice spurned as socially backward. Social Education owed little to British adult education but a good deal to the model of Soviet planning and perhaps in response to that perceived threat, a substantial amount to Frank Laubach's Christian anti-Communist 'Each One Teach One' programmes backed by US aid (Shah 1991, p.22). As Shah points out, Laubach's methods were not learned from formal adult education pedagogy but Indian traditions of story telling (p. 20). Social Education may then be best understood not as sub-category of that inescapably Western category 'Adult Education' in a flourish of neo-colonial incorporation, but as an element of the (élitist, according to Chatterjee) history of Indian nationalism. More weight is added by remembering that the great shift from the highly bureaucratised and corrupt Social Education programme to the NAEP, which attempted a radical decentralisation, was taken less for educational than political reasons, when the Congress Party was displaced by the Janata Party in the early 1980s. UNESCO's concept of 'Fundamental Education', the successor to 'Mass Education', which began life as Fabian inspired approach to decolonialisation during World War II, in turn gave way to 'Community Development', the three names revealing a quite extraordinary paradigmatic shift. The 'mass' had become the 'community' and 'fundamental education' then became 'development'. This is not intended as semantic nit-picking but to show that the objectives had shifted markedly. Ironically, the concept of community development was imported to Britain in the 1960s at precisely the same time it was being rejected in Africa. Julius Nyerere in the newly independent Tanzania, especially, criticised the note of the Colonialist condescension implied in the term. He rejected the assumption that Tanzania was a primitive country which had to be 'developed' into a western image and instead substituted the notion of *Ujamaa* or family-hood (Hall, 1975). In Tanzania thereafter, adult education became inscribed into the discourse of 'nation-building'.

If a conclusion can be drawn from these reflections, it might be that any attempt to straitjacket Adult Education research into categories which reflect conventional divisions of knowledge, in the pursuit of rigour, is probably misguided. Instead it should celebrate its promiscuous transgressing of academic discourses and seek to create new objects of knowledge. So much for reflection theory. If Adult Education, formally instituted, is indeed in the process of dissolution into Higher and Further Education and is forsaking its unruly past, the social movements which will embody its successors may at least then be inspired by its multiple possibilities.

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Feminist issues in adult education research: links and conflicts

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As a researcher, I wear two hats: I am a feminist psychologist and I am a feminist adult educator. This paper represents my attempt to bring together these two areas of concern (which are linked, of course) by looking at the relationship between current feminist psychologists' discussions about the purpose and forms of research and related questions within adult education.

Within psychology, although many have disagreed with the 'scientific' nature and purposes of social science research (and corollary claims of social science research to be an objective and value-free activity delivering universal truths), these challenges have only recently resulted in ideas about what questions researchers should be asking and how research should be done. Adult educators have been asking what purposes research should serve, and what forms research should take for rather longer. Recent developments such as those of Carr and Kemmis (1986) argue that the aim of research should not be to generate 'causal explanations of human life but to deepen and extend our knowledge of why social life is perceived and experienced in the way it is' (p.90).

Many adult educators have found this a helpful perspective and used it to achieve different ends. For some, the process of doing research has been seen as a vehicle for changing people's lives indirectly. A typical example of this is action research: 'Action research is small-scale intervention in the functioning of the real world and a close examination of the effects of such intervention' (Stenhouse, 1979) which is characterised by being situational, collaborative, participatory and self-evaluative (Cohen and Manion, 1989). At the other end of the spectrum is research which is much more interventionist in political agendas: 'Research methods and skills can be appropriated for counter-hegemonic work by oppositional groups and can thereby empower subjects individually and collectively in specific contexts — although the context does not in any way limit the area of concern' (Westwood, 1992, p.197).[1]

There remain some central questions in adult education which seem to be asked and answered in ways which are untouched by feminist and post-modern agendas. In the main, these could be termed 'psychological' questions. They are questions about the nature of learning and the particular nature of adult students (for example, much of the work in North America on androgogy). At their heart is a belief that there are some fundamental 'truths' about adult learning that can be uncovered and used to 'improve' learning for the individual. These beliefs are very much aligned to positivistic psychology.

It could be argued that such psychological questions (that is, psychological approaches to learning) are just not relevant to adult education practitioners because they are asked in a theoretical paradigm that is impersonal, ahistorical and asocial (Usher and Bryant, 1989), and cannot provide answers for the practitioner. They are also concerned with generalities, rather than the experience of the individual — and thus the object of psychological research (the person) disappears. On the other hand, some have argued that adult education has to base itself on the knowledge generated by theoretical disciplines such as psychology and sociology (Bright, 1985) because it is not a theoretical field of study. Neither position acknowledges psychologies which have, at their heart, many of the same aims as radical adult education research. These psychologies challenge the nature of psychological knowledge; they introduce ideas about the specificity and social construction of knowledge, the conjunction of knowledge and power, the relationship between language and subjectivity and the analysis of discourse and rhetoric. Ultimately, in the case of feminist psychologies, they are concerned with psychologies for women, rather than psychologies about women.

To what extent have these feminist influences been felt within adult education research, not only in terms of content (that is, what is researched), but also in terms of process (that is, how is it researched)? Do feminist approaches offer us the chance to 'change the subject' of adult education research? Do they allow us to develop answers that are for women rather than about women?

Much of the work on women and adult education is characterised by a focus on the under-representation of women and the role of adult education as a vehicle for transformation for those women (for example, the role of adult education as an emancipatory tool for women [Hart, 1992; Schedler, 1993]). However, many examples of research are characterised by uncontested claims about the particular nature of 'women's education' (Malcolm, 1992) and unsupported ideas about the characteristics of women learners.

Despite attempts to portray feminist methodology as a formula for doing research, feminist researchers in psychology and sociology argue that there is no one set of methods or techniques that identifies feminist research. Instead, they argue that feminists 'should use any and every means available for investigating the 'condition of women in sexist society' (Stanley, 1990, p.12). Ultimately, the goal of feminist research is to forward the cause of women. In other words, feminist researchers argue that there should be a shift in focus from research on women (that is, on women as the object of research) to research for women. In some cases, researchers have seen the relationship and ultimate empowerment of the women they are researching as a principal part of the research; in others, researchers have been content with using their research results to serve feminist agendas which acknowledge women as equal to men or promote women's perspectives.

While some feminist research in adult education has been concerned with establishing the condition of women's lives from which these changes can take place, others have been much more directly involved in action research projects (eg Taking Liberties Collective, 1989; Gardiner, 1986) which have tried to change women's lives — in other words, they have been involved in praxis. Of course, much of the practice of adult education is concerned with empowerment; but to what extent can this be (or has this been) a feature of feminist research?

Stanley and Wise (1993) argue that feminism is not just a way of seeing or a way of knowing (a perspective and an epistemology) — it is also a way of being in the world (an ontology). Feminism exists in research processes and what makes feminist research processes 'feminist' is located

> in the researcher-researched relationship; in emotion as an aspect of the research process which, like any other aspect, can be analytically interrogated; in critically unpacking conceptualizations of 'objectivity' and 'subjectivity' as binaries or dichotomies; in the intellectual autobiography of researchers (...); in the existence and management of different 'realities' or versions held by researchers and researched; and in issues surrounding authority and power in research, but also, and perhaps more crucially in written representations of research (p.189).

Within psychology, these ideas have been talked about but there are few models of research which can accommodate such a shift away from the notion of the researcher as a distanced individual who searches out universal truths. One of the problems for psychologists has been the exclusion and distortion of women's experiences within the discipline. Thus, most of the attempts to bring women into the frame have been concerned with making them the subject of research, rather than men (changing the content of research). The difficulty lies in the ways in which feminist psychologists have done the research (changed the process of research) — although more qualitative methods have been used, it seems difficult to escape the straitjacket of empirical methodologies and the quest for universal 'truths'.

Feminist psychologists try to resolve this problem of doing feminist research in different ways; some by taking research to be something that is self-reflexive and that questions the objective researcher/subjective subject divide (eg Hollway, 1989; Walkerdine, 1990).) Others argue that feminist research should have an overt political agenda which challenges received wisdoms about sexuality, race and class, as well as gender (Kitzinger, 1987; Ussher, 1991; Wilkinson and Kitzinger, 1993).

Despite this progress towards research that is more critical about relationships between researcher and researched, more self-reflexive and ultimately less 'universal' (that is, accepting that psychological research is also historically, socially and politically situated despite its own claims), the work on women and learning is still very much in the 'egalitarian' mould (Squire, 1989) — that is, the recognition that women have been excluded from many of the theories presented by psychology and the belief that they can be taken into account by 'adding them in'. One of the reasons why feminist psychologists end up doing this kind of research (which does not look very different from traditional psychological research) is that it is difficult to escape the demands to produce certain kinds of research findings — findings that are generalisable and stand as the 'truth'. Another reason is that there are few outlets for publishing research that is not positivist.

So what does research on women's learning within psychology look like? Is this feminist research because it is on women, and if not, why not? I focus on Belenky *et al's* work on 'Women's Ways of Knowing' because it is the most systematic attempt within both psychology and adult education to try to take account of the ways in which women learn and the conditions for learning. They are concerned with one of my central concerns as a teacher and a researcher: how can I understand the differing realities of the women I teach and work with and what can I understand about the ways in which women draw conclusions about truth, knowledge and authority? While my desire to generalise and to discover 'truths' seems to trap me in the very criticisms I was raising about traditional psychological approaches, I am looking for answers which are helpful organising principles but which do not claim to describe completely women's ways of looking at the world.

Their work, which is strongly influenced by that of Carol Gilligan (1982), describes five different perspectives from which women view reality and draw conclusions about truth, knowledge and authority. They argue that women may have common modes of learning, knowing and valuing and that women's self concepts and their ways of knowing are intertwined. They are particularly concerned with what they call intuitive knowledge (as opposed to so-called objective knowledge).

Belenky *et al* are also concerned with the common ground of women's experience and therefore aimed to bring together experiences from a very diverse range of women in their research. They selected and interviewed 135 women in all, some of whom attended academic institutions and some of whom made use of 'invisible colleges' (agencies that provided information about or assistance with parenting).

Through their interview material, Belenky and her colleagues developed five epistemological categories to describe women's perspectives on knowing: silence, received knowledge, subjective knowledge, procedural knowledge and constructed knowledge. These categories move from a position in which women experience themselves as mindless and voiceless and subject to the whims of external authority through to a position in which women view all knowledge as contextual, experience themselves as creators of knowledge and value both subjective and objective strategies for knowing. There is a clear hierarchy in their minds about the best position to be in, and, although they do not at any point discuss it, there is little doubt about where they believe they stand themselves.

They also discuss the consequences of their research for the education of women. They emphasise the importance of beginning with a woman's knowledge (rather than the teacher's), the relationship between teacher and student (and the importance of 'connectedness' in that relationship), the idea that teachers should be midwives (teachers who help students articulate and expand their latent knowledge), the need for 'connected' classes in which the roles of teachers and students merge, and the need for 'objective' (ie seeing the other) teaching.

While many of these ideas are appealing to us as adult educators because they seem to offer both a theoretical description of learning and a series of practical outcomes, there are problems for me as a feminist researcher with the questions that were asked and with the way in which the research was done. While I want to address the question of whether this could be considered feminist research, there are many primary difficulties which I would deal with if I had space. For example, there is a problem with the way in which the research question was based on a romantic view of women — a view which ignores differences between women. Underlying this view is an idea that women are inevitably more connected than men because of their domestic experiences and responsibilities, no matter what their social and economic circumstances.

Why would I consider this not to be feminist research, although it is about women? First of all, the nature of the researcher-researched relationship is not questioned at all. Although the researchers are clearly sympathetic to the women they interviewed, and they discuss their desire to talk to a sample which would include women from different ethnic backgrounds and a broad range of social classes, their own positions in relation to those women is not under scrutiny. The women who are least like them are seen as Other and are likely to be found at the other end of their range of perspectives (that is, as 'silent' women).

Secondly, the authors' own intellectual autobiographies are absent. Although they acknowledge three or four major writers who contribute to their analysis, as readers, we have no sense of their own histories and positions in relation to the research.

This leads to a third problem which is the tension between their desire to honour each woman's point of view and their own desire to group responses so that, in their attempts to get at truths, they ask themselves 'What are the problems this woman is trying to solve? What is adaptive about the way she is trying to accommodate to the world as she sees it? What are the forces — psychological and social — that expand or limit her horizons?' In this process, they are confusing their own work as researchers with what a woman is 'really' saying: they are imposing their own framework of understanding on women's responses without understanding that this very process cannot honour what a woman says: inevitably, it describes a different reality.

As a result, the authors ignore the whole question of power in research and writing; they use their positions unthinkingly as academics to portray a world in which women can be portrayed as silent and are, indeed, silenced by such a portrayal.

This demonstrates how work about women may have feminist intentions but there is no necessity for this to be recognisable as feminist research. So what are the consequences for us as feminist researchers? What should we be doing? I suspect that little of the research in the adult education literature that relates to women could be termed feminist, using the criteria laid out by Liz Stanley and others. Furthermore, the issues raised by the ontology of feminism may be ones that others have tried to tackle under the guise of 'participatory' research, 'action' research or 'transformative' research (and there has been no claim by feminist researchers that they are the only ones asking these questions). But at least the political incentives for transformative and other such research are not disguised beneath a cloak of 'objectivity'. If we are to examine the power relationships in research relationships both between researcher and researched, and between research and writing, we will need to research in a much more self-reflexive way; we will need to rethink our relationship with the objects of our research (our subjects) and we will need to re-examine the very questions we ask and the conditions under which these questions get asked. My two hats still don't fit on one head. Feminist psychology offers me the chance to research women in ways that are for women, but the work in psychology that is most relevant to my work in adult education seems to me to be 'unfeminist' in its approaches to research and, indeed, in the uncritical questions it asks about the general nature of women's learning. The process of writing this paper has left me with even more questions about what I research in women's education and the methods I use to research women's learning.

FOOTNOTE

[1] There has been an attempt to establish so-called 'transformative research' as a research paradigm within adult education, although the existence of such a paradigm is contested. (See Armstrong and Miller, 1991).

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2. Methodological issues

Introduction by Richard Edwards
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THE papers collected in this strand of the conference reflect on the issues of methodology raised in the activity of research. Like the activity itself, the issues take many and diverse forms. Diversity is also to be found in these papers. At risk of over-simplification, this diversity can be framed by two possible readings: first, in relation to the issues explored in the papers; second, in relation to the stance of the author in narrating the issues. There are clear overlaps between these readings.

The first focuses on the methodological issues themselves and these fall broadly into three categories: technical issues; personal issues; and ethical and political issues. Whether it is in relation to literature searches, questionnaire design, or the structuring of interviews, a range of familiar technical concerns for accumulating and interpreting data are brought to light in this strand. The personal issues explored in some of these papers reflect the authors' feelings about their research activities. We are introduced to the longings of the lone distant researcher and the 'insight, mistake and luck' that can inform the research activity. Ethical and political issues are embedded in methods of research and the fact that these are historical/have a history as well as contemporary relevance is put forward for consideration. The second reading of these papers provides a framework to examine the narrative stance of the authors. Three forms of writing about methodological issues can be discerned: distant, personal and committed. The distant stance is the voice of 'objective' analysis, of academic discourse, framing the issues as 'facts'. The personal stance is the voice of 'experience', of feelings about the activities of research. The committed stance is the voice of 'judgement', framing the 'rightness' and 'wrongness' of the methods of research and its purposes.

The overlap between these two readings is obvious: the distant stance discussing technical issues; the personal stance exploring personal issues; the committed stance highlighting ethical and political issues. And therein lies the simplification, as each of these papers evades the enclosure offered by the analysis above. In other words, within each paper there is an inter-weaving of issues and narrative stances. This, in itself, raises methodological issues on the activity of reading research, of categorisation and hermeneutics.

There is no end to the learning necessary to the activity of research and this is clearly demonstrated by all the authors in this strand.

Group based research: commitment or compromise?

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Abstract

FOCUS group interviews can provide the researcher with detailed and carefully considered qualitative data from the people most knowledgeable about the research issues. Group interviews are particularly useful when time and resources are limited or when participation, consensus and a degree of commitment need to be built into the research process. This paper considers some of the special characteristics of a focus group and discusses the role of a facilitator who is also a researcher. In particular it examines ways to ensure group consensus does not exclude individuals who may feel compromised rather than committed if the final outcomes fail to reflect all perspectives.

Introduction

In a bizarre little experiment conducted in 1969, psychologists measured the performance of cockroaches running away from a light source. They found that the cockroaches ran faster if the runway was lined with an 'audience' of fellow cockroaches, each watching from a perspex box (Zajonc, 1969, cited in Baron, Kerr and Miller, 1992). In other words, the presence of a group had a facilitating effect upon performance. As a researcher who works largely with groups I found this result strangely comforting. It seemed to provide some sort of natural vindication for my methodology.

This is not to liken group participants to cockroaches. The vast majority of participants have nothing at all in common with this creature apart from their willingness (usually) to make an extra effort in the presence of their peers. It is said that participants in a group are both audience and co-actors: they perform and evaluate at the same time. As audience they retain an individualistic and critical perspective; as actors they must take their cues from others. A question for group facilitators is whether this leads to an inherent role conflict. Is the individual's commitment to the group's decision lessened in any way through a need to compromise his or her own position for the sake of consensus?

Although consensus is widely regarded as the best way of achieving a quality group decision, a false consensus (one which is more apparent than real) may later prove counter-productive and could easily throw into question the legitimacy of the final outcome. The aim of this paper is to make some observations on this matter of consensus and to consider why groups, despite their limitations, can still be a viable option for data collection.

Why use groups?

As any teacher or committee member knows, groups can be exasperating, difficult and inefficient. To use a group as a research tool seems to be asking for unnecessary complications. Yet I firmly believe group based research methodologies offer a means of information gathering well suited to a field such as Adult Education, where an acknowledgment of the rights of people to participate in decisions which affect their lives is a dominant value. In fact the need to build consultation and consensus into the data collection process first led to my involvement with group based research, in particular the single-purpose focus group. While focus groups are normally associated more with market research than academic inquiry, in recent years there has been a growing interest in qualitative methodologies which include a group interview component (see, for example, Hedges, 1985; Watts and Ebbutt, 1987; O'Donnell, 1988; Cohen and Manion, 1989; Caffarella and O'Donnell, 1991). A focus group consists of people with particular knowledge and experience brought together to represent the views of a wider constituency. For instance, ten supervisors might provide data or ideas on behalf of middle management in a particular industry. The researcher's emphasis is on gathering data, opinions and ideas quickly and accurately. In my field (HRD) this information is usually gathered for purposes of occupational or competency analysis, training needs assessment or program design. I have also used focus groups to explore attitudes to change, feelings about work and to generate ideas about specific problems. The purpose, therefore, normally dictates a fairly structured, instrumental approach and most of the research questions will have been formulated before the group convenes.

In this sense the type of research I am concerned with is quite different to participatory action research, which aims to effect organisational change or political empowerment through group reflection and action. But as with action research, the focus group facilitator can avoid the stance of "outside expert" which is often resented by people within an organisation. My role is to acknowledge and uncover the expertise within the group, guiding the discussion without actually contributing to its content. For most trainers and educators, leading a group discussion is familiar territory, hence another reason for my belief that such an approach is highly suitable to research in these areas.

Other advantages

There are several additional advantages which I see for group based methodologies. In contrast to an individual interview, a group interview allows interaction, debate and varied perspectives to be brought to bear on the topic. The result is data which is qualitatively different to that which could be obtained by summing the results of individual interviews.

There is also a large body of empirical evidence to suggest groups can recall information more accurately and more completely than individuals in isolation (see Hare, 1976). In my experience group membership also has a tendency to reinforce individual commitment to the group's norms and decisions making subsequent implementation easier. Groups themselves promote commitment, provided, of course, there is no feeling of personal compromise.

The group processes

A focus group, brought together for a short time to address a specific issue, is task oriented and works to a set agenda. This helps obviate dysfunctional power games and time wasting diversions. I never attempt to facilitate a focus group without some tools to provide structure and closure. Three in particular are most useful in my area: Nominal Group Technique (NGT), Dacum and Functional Analysis. All provide a formal framework which makes efficient use of time and encourages a participatory climate

In each of these processes the researcher is also the facilitator. The objective is to elicit information and ideas previously unknown, unconnected or unavailable. Using the experience of the group, the facilitator poses a series of questions which all members attempt to answer. This may be achieved through silent reflection, followed by a sharing of ideas and a subsequent evaluation and ranking (NGT) or through a logical analysis of the component parts of an entity (such as an occupation) after an initial brainstorm to generate ideas (Dacum and Functional Analysis). In any case, each session has a definite objective and follows a planned agenda.

A collection of people or a group?

The fact that certain people are in the same room at the same time does not make them a group. A focus group arrives with no history and leaves with no future. As Shaw (1976) points out, such a group has no traditions to draw upon and there are no expectations of future interaction. I prefer, where possible, for group members to be drawn from a variety of sources. However this means the members are usually unknown to each other and may feel little responsibility for any consequences which might follow from their deliberations. This presents the first challenge, since I believe a vital part of the facilitator's role is to give the group a very strong feeling of responsibility and a real sense of purpose. Later commitment will depend upon this.

Recent thinking suggests cohesiveness is a major defining characteristic of a group (Hogg, 1992). Perhaps the easiest way of turning a collection of people into a cohesive group is through giving each individual a stake in a common goal. I have seen that a group of strangers can work effectively as a team and establish friendly interpersonal relations in quite a short time provided they have a sense of some common purpose and a structure is provided for the group processes. A focus group also benefits from a slight sense of urgency and an awareness of the relevance of their work. Personal concerns may need to be subjugated in order to achieve a specific task. Commitment to outcomes may then be built on the basis that all participants have contributed equally and the final product is the sole reason for the group's existence in the first place.

Since they are short-lived, focus groups seldom suffer from the tensions which can arise when task is continually stressed over relationships. With NGT discussion is limited to certain times and themes, mainly for purposes of clarification. This is useful for preventing arguments developing. The fact that all contributions become group property once they have been listed and quantity of ideas is emphasised also lessens the need for individuals to defend a position (see Delbecq *et al*, 1976 for further discussion of this).

With the right choice of participants, facilitating a focus group can be an enjoyable and productive experience. Unfortunately, choice of participants is something over which facilitators may have little control. We ask for experienced, representative and articulate volunteers. We get whoever can be spared on the day. We ask for ten participants, we are sent four. There may be other problems too, particularly if individuals feel they are there to argue for a position or there are disruptive, taciturn or unmotivated participants within the group. Since researchers seldom have authority in these matters we rely very much on the goodwill of supervisors to send suitable people and on the willingness of the people sent to cooperate with us.

With less than ideal participants the facilitator must work harder and subsequent validation of results becomes more important. In any case, a questionnaire or interview follow-up is important to allow those not in the group to comment and so to become involved in the project. Data provided by a group is useful only insofar as it reflects generally agreed opinions within the group's constituency or takes account of all the situational variables. The researcher should normally seek to validate such data. The fact that the results of the workshop will be validated actually assists the group achieve consensus, since their collective decision is largely provisional.

Seeking consensus

All interactive groups operate on the basis of consensus, an agreement to accept the norms and decisions of the group in exchange for membership rights. Fear of rejection can be a strong incentive to feign agreement. Still, a large group will normally take much longer to reach consensus than a smaller one. With Dacum, which requires all participants to agree before moving on, consensus is vital. Thus having cooperative participants willing to concede the occasional point is important. Although NGT is not in itself a consensus-seeking technique it is preferable for all participants to feel comfortable with the final decision, even if they personally do not agree with it. Consensus is neither a compromise nor a democratic vote. Compromise involves finding a middle path between two positions, while consensus means a willingness by all parties to accept the group's decision whatever that may be. A simple majority vote results in winners and losers, a situation hardly conducive to later commitment. Sheer fatigue may lead to apparent consensus and the facilitator needs to continually test consensus through questioning and sensitivity to body language. Given that unanimous agreement is not always possible, even when discussing ostensibly factual data, I feel the best way to achieve consensus without compromise is to agree to a provisional position. In this way those not in agreement can at least agree to reserve their final judgement until the data has been further validated. Their integrity remains intact while the need for a decision has been met. The researcher, concerned with gathering data or generating ideas, is looking for broad agreement rather than total assent in every case.

Some reservations

Highly structured group processes work best when time is limited, there is a specific task to be accomplished, participants are willing to share ideas and and the facilitator is accepted as the group leader. These conditions may not always be present and in an unstable organisational environment or when dealing with highly individualistic participants a less formal, more open procedure is indicated. The restrictions imposed by the structured techniques may be uncomfortable for those who wish to discuss things more freely or who feel inhibited by predetermined group strategies.

Additional problems may be created by unbalanced representation, by the facilitator's failure to separate facts from feelings or by the group's unfamiliarity with certain issues and situations. Since the group is only short-lived a lack of commitment on the part of individual members may indeed lead to a false consensus and later feelings of personal compromise. The careful selection and briefing of the group prior to the workshop and the ability of the facilitator to recognise such problems can, however, go some of the way towards preventing this. It is also difficult for a group to provide substantive or quantifiable data. In fact several workshops with the same or different groups may be needed to develop a really comprehensive picture. The phenomenon of 'group think' (Janis, 1982) is also a reality with a small group of similar participants. Groups are a powerful research tool but all the normal cautions in regard to data collection still apply.

Conclusion

People who give of their time and energies to contribute to a group interview reasonably expect to have their voices heard. As facilitators we do our best to ensure everyone has an equal say, group harmony is maintained and the coffee arrives hot. A focus group can be tiring and frustrating. However, I worry only if it ceases to be a group: if individuals start taking sides or hidden agenda emerge or political issues dominate the discussion. At times like this the only recourse is to call for time out or even reconvene a new group at a later date.

I have found participant satisfaction with the process is usually high. They may be surprised at the amount of data they were able to produce or the richness of the experiences they had to draw upon. While individuals may hold differing views a formal technique, such as Dacum or NGT, allows them to feel they have contributed to the final group decision. In any case, if strong differences exist traditional research methodologies would do no more than reveal them. In a group situation there is a chance, at least, of moving towards a resolution.

The techniques I have referred to in this paper were designed for special purpose applications but need not be limited to these. Many teachers use a version of NGT for class brainstorms, while the others simply provide a methodical way of developing, clustering and organising data, for whatever purpose. They can be used both to stimulate creative thinking and to tackle a problem in a logical manner. Hence their versatility for a range of situations and issues, particularly at an organisational level. But it is their participatory nature which I feel makes them worthy of serious consideration by those of us involved in research in an area where people's ideas and opinions are seen to matter.

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Adult education as history: adult educators as historians

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> 'A large part of what passes for adult education theory is an extraordinary combination of sectarianism, special pleading, mythmaking and mortmain.' (Raymond Williams, *New Statesman*, 30 May 1959).

The ambiguities of adult education history

HISTORICAL studies have been an influential (once very influential) area of research into adult education [AE], and university adult education [UAE] in particular. There are many histories of AE, rather more than of some other fields which — taking a dispassionate view — would seem as deserving of historical scrutiny, e.g. sport, the Conservative Party, or conservation movements. Virtually all historians of AE have been professionals within it. What has impelled so many adult educators to research histories of the field? What have been the consequences for AE itself? Has AE history a future?

The greater part of AE history has been starkly empirical. This is a consequence of more than just antiquarian curiosity. When not triumphalist, it has still been driven by a teleology of contemporary 'relevance'. In itself this is not surprising. AE, perceiving itself to be marginal, has felt the need frequently to seek both the validation and inspiration of history; it is also understandable that practitioners should 'dig where they stand'. Contemporary relevance alone, though, is no guarantee of a place in the historiography of continuing education, certain areas of which have yielded more historians, and therefore more histories than others. Literature on vocational education and training is sparse, that on University Extension and the WEA plentiful. Liberal adult education [LAE] predominates within the historiography. Avowedly directed to general advancement and the enlargement of the mind; ostensibly open-minded and unprejudiced; strongly inclined to the furtherance of progressive reform, democracy, and abolition of privilege, LAE has inculcated its values into its historians. They in turn have reflected its [false] naivety. Even where the subject has not been specifically LAE, histories of AE have been characterised by the same brisk progressivism, seeking to relate the steady development of their subject to social progress and the emergence of modern society. The central concern has been AE as a civilising process.

This conceptual framework has eminently suited the close-grained empirical research at which historians of AE have excelled. Like the many local histories which have emerged from adult educators' professional practice as history teachers, AE histories have been painstaking essays in retrieval, reconstruction and the rescue of pioneers from oblivion. Moreover, when they have assumed a national stance, they have often remained anchored at the regional level, e.g. the influential work of Harrison (1961) and Jepson (1973), both focused on Yorkshire (mainly the West Riding), and more recently John Bligh's ***English University Adult Education, 1908-1958: A Unique Tradition***, a study of the extra-mural activities of Leeds, Manchester and Liverpool.

Such an approach is shot-through with conceptual ambiguities and problems. An uncritical teleology (or 'Whig interpretation') is a common problem in writing history, but one which other areas of historical endeavour have recently sought to throw off. Historians of AE, however, have been largely unresponsive to new moods in historical research. Power relations, gender relations, and adult learning outside 'the canon' have been alike ignored. True, an alternative approach has been built upon Marxist perspectives. Here at least empiricism has been tempered by a broader conceptualisation that has illuminated state and class-relationships. Yet the product is hardly less progressivist, and, as John Field (1992) points out, has been strangely monofocal. Marxisant scholarship is alive to alternative educational practice, but the practice has always been that of the labour movement. Its articulation of power relations within AE has lacked subtlety, whilst it has ignored gender issues almost as routinely as the 'mainstream' scholarship it has so passionately opposed.

The ambiguities of writing the history of AE are compounded as the historian approaches the present. Knowing that objectivity is illusory need not deter an historian, but the heightened awareness of unavoidable subjectivity when studying one's immediate present can. *Learning and Living*, perhaps the finest of all histories of AE (Harrison, 1961), becomes curiously unsatisfying in its final chapters as it examines episodes and issues in which the Leeds department had been a major protagonist. As a reviewer remarked: 'The inaccuracy, if it is there, is not in matters of fact, but in the equally relevant questions of estimating consciousness and personality' (Williams, 1962). It is also difficult to avoid an institutionally-centred approach at this point (which *Learning and*

Living elsewhere successfully did). And the present must always appear uncomfortably politically-charged to the participant historian. Harrison offered little hint, for example, of the full range of ideological debates in the period from 1946, debates in which he had at times been a not-inconspicuous participant (e.g. Harrison, Hoggart and Shaw, 1948; Harrison, 1949).

Consequences for adult education

Bereft of a theoretical corpus or methodology to call their own adult educators (from LAE particularly) have too-often substituted history for theory. The tendency has been to contemplate not present but past practice, viewing the present only through the refraction of a version of history. An ostensibly value-free (because empirical) historicism has prevailed over theoretically informed reflection upon current practices. A further stage of refraction, at the level of policy making, resulted in the idea of 'the great tradition in university adult education' (Wiltshire, 1956). The Great Tradition (the capitals, it would seem, are now obligatory) continues to be at the heart of how many UAE professionals conceptualise what they do. Recently it was reasserted as part of the campaign to head-off the central thrust of the HEFC Continuing Education Policy Review (Tuckett, 1993). Meanwhile no other profession is as apt to use the adjective 'traditional', unselfconsciously to describe what it does ('traditional LAE', 'traditional extra-mural work').

UAE has also taken comfort from history, or more correctly from a version of history, to sustain its isolation from HE proper. This isolation, arguably, was the condition for the production of much valuable, socially purposive work. However, since the 1970s, if not earlier, the appeal to history has too-often been used to justify an isolation that has appeared increasingly reckless. When the seemingly-perennial '1919 Report' was reprinted (by the Nottingham AE Department) in 1980, it was published with a general introduction by a recently retired director which opined that 'it is surprising how often we find that the agenda for our discussions has been written by the *1919 Report* and that its uses are still by no means exhausted' (Wiltshire, 1980: 23). The situation was less surprising than sad. As Marriott observed, in concluding his history of the 'extra-mural empires' which were the most conspicuous legatees of UAE's self-imprisonment within its past, 'The dominant values of the extra-mural system, critics allege, are defensive and nostalgic. . . . By tinkering with administrative methods devised in and for the dim past, the system has settled for the narrowest possible approach to defining the purposes of adult education' (Marriott, 1984: 122; cf Harries-Jenkins, 1983: 8-9).

One of the curious aspects of the continuing affinity UAE seems to have felt for the concept of the Great Tradition is a blissful ignorance of the controversy that originally greeted it. Even its author conceded that it seemed 'to add up to something which is essentially nineteenth-century and desperately unmodish, something woolly-minded and crassly optimistic, something provincial and intellectually slack, a tradition which confuses scholarship with social service to the detriment of both' (Wiltshire, 1956: 89). A back-handed compliment to the power of the traditional history of AE was paid to it by some who tried to counteract its prominence within UAE. The authors of a substantial study of accreditation in LAE, which inter alia also pioneered the application of sociological organisation theory to UAE, felt it necessary to devote one of its longest chapters to 'the Prehistory of University Extra-Mural Awards', covering the years 1873-1938. In doing so they observed that 'the history of examinable study and paper awards is as old as extra-mural work itself. The general lack of interest in this fact suggests how easily the purposes of persuasion can cause a segment of history to be identified as the tradition' (Duke and Marriott, 1973: 55). Eight years later the chapter was substantially expanded, explicitly to retrieve an alternative history of UAE, implicitly to help validate alternative practice (Marriott, 1981).

Whilst exponents of both adult and extension education have frequently grounded defences of their professional practice in an appeal to history, continued professional educators have not. As noted above, the literature on technical and vocational training is thin, for which three reasons may be advanced. Firstly, however uneven the British record in this area, professionals within it have felt more sure of their ground and confident of their place in the spectrum of provision than other UAE staff. Secondly, of course, they are far less likely to have studied or taught history. Thirdly, historians' perception and therefore definition of what AE actually is has been exclusive. This exclusivity has in turn permeated the culture and policy objectives of much UAE, significantly assisted (it seems reasonable to suggest) by the extent to which historians, and historians of AE in particular, have themselves scaled the heights of the profession. From an early date the writing of AE history became the particular province of the professional 'high-flyer'. Kelly had already begun the doctoral thesis that became his monumental study of Birkbeck when he was appointed Director of Extra-Mural Studies at Liverpool (Kelly, 1957). At Leeds Harrison's PhD and his first book (1954) similarly preceded his appointment as Deputy (subsequently Acting-) Director. Readers will doubtless be able to supply further examples of the convergence of historical scholarship with high office. The pursuit of history has played an important part in the professionalisation of UAE, not least in demarking out policy makers from tutors.

In this UAE has conformed to a pattern discernible elsewhere in education. Research in the secondary sector has shown that its culture and criteria for promotion privilege historians. It is relatively easy to comprehend why certain 'academic' subjects have prevailed 'over and against the practical and expressive' (Ball, 1987: 174). It is less obvious why history should be particularly privileged, especially within the context of UAE which largely excludes practical and expressive subjects in the first place, and where the competing range of academic disciplines is wider than in secondary schools. The answer surely lies in the symbiosis between historicism and policy in AE. In retrospect it can be argued that the consequences may have disenabled UAE. This is not to argue that historians make poor administrators or policy makers, nor to cast doubt on any of the individuals cited in this paper: but it is legitimate to contemplate critically the cumulative effect on UAE as an area of practice and research. It is hardly surprising that the policies and culture of UAE have been shaped by the historicism of the Great Tradition, when qualification as a historian has so often doubled as a qualification to direct its policy.

An agenda: from the history of adult education to histories of adults learning

Some thoughts about an agenda for the future are embedded above: gender and power relations, technical and vocational education, AE 'outside the canon'. The enclosure of AE history from other areas of historical study must continue to be dismantled. As AE comes to terms with new and profound changes, historians may have a role to play, not by leading a retreat into a comforting nostalgia, but by exploring the hugely diverse experiences of adults learning in the past.

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Researching the use and evaluation of experiential teaching methods in university-based adult and continuing education

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THE project was initially motivated by curiosity about the teaching methods and techniques used by tutors and trainers in university-based adult and continuing education (ACE). In particular there was a special interest in the use of role play, and simulation and gaming within the general domain of what may be described as 'experiential' teaching techniques.

There were two main stages of data collection: a postal questionnaire and then follow-up interviews with a number of the respondents. Before data collection could commence however a literature review was necessary in order to clarify the term 'experiential'.

The emphasis here will be on reflecting on the nature of the research process in this particular field rather than the results of the study. These will be alluded to only in so far as they illuminate issues within the research process itself.

The experiential learning/teaching context

There appeared to be the common belief that an educational 'revolution' had occurred over the past few decades which included the development of 'experiential teaching methods' such as gaming, simulation and role play. Tansey and Unwin (1969), for example, referred to a trend of using the 'new educational techniques' of simulation and gaming. A number of commentators point out that these techniques are hardly new but have their origins in history (Taylor and Walford 1974, Van Ments, 1989).

Since the 1960s, the increase in usage of such methods has been seen as a 'boom' (Kolb and Lewis,1986:99) and well documented by those with a particular interest in them such as members of organisations like the Society for the Advancement of Gaming and Simulation in Education and Training (SAGSET). Taylor and Walford described the expansion of experiential teaching with an accompanying, 'tremendous growth in the number of games and users, expansion of literature and diversity of enlarged interest.' (*op.cit.*). Whilst some of this increased usage of these methods occurred in schools, they also extended to ACE where the focus of this research project lay. It has long been a tenet of adult education that the background and experience of the student was an important resource to be tapped in the classroom. Providing more interactive learning situations for adults to meet their varied needs can therefore be seen as a particular concern of ACE tutors.

Usher summed up this situation:

> An adult educator is continually faced with the problem of how to use students' experience productively in the classroom. We all recognise that adult students have a wealth of experience which properly used can be a rich resource for learning, whatever the subject being studied. As a result, a wide variety of experiential techniques have been developed to tap this resource. (1986:24)

New opportunities, then, have been presented for tutors to expand their repertoire of teaching methods. However there is also potential for confusion because of a wide diversity of definitions and practices centring around the term 'experiential'. As the literature indicates, it is often used interchangeably with 'interactive'. For example, Gredler (1992) moves from one adjective to the other.

This is not just a question of semantics, but involves aspects of educational philosophy and practice and was to have an effect on the research design. If the term 'experiential' has different uses, then it could not be assumed that its application to teaching methods such as gaming, role and simulation would be identified or shared by all ACE tutors.

Warner Weil and McGill's (1989) classification work was useful as a starting point. They point out that 'experiential learning' has been used to describe educational practices ranging from practical work experience to classroom based simulations. At its broadest it is learning through experience, involving many possibilities. It may simply mean 'different things to different people.' Apart from this, there are also, 'different values about experiential learning' (Warner Weil & McGill, *op.cit:* xix).

They identify four 'villages' within what they term the 'global village' of experiential learning. These are not totally separate entities but are interrelated:it is the emphasis or focus in each 'village' which distinguishes them from each other.

The first one relates to assessment and accreditation of prior learning (APEL) as a means of gaining access and recognition in relation to educational institutions, employment, professional bodies and so on. APEL has developed rapidly in recent years with the entry into higher education of increasing numbers of adult students. (Evans 1992)

The second 'village' focuses on activities intended to bring about changes in the practice, structures and purposes of post-school education. This is clearly a broader perspective than APEL with inherent value judgements about the nature of adult learning.

The third emphasises learning from experience as the core of education for social change mainly outside educational institutions. Again there are values involved here as well as implications for the educational process. Finally, the fourth 'village' is seen as emphasising the potential and practice of personal growth and development.

A definition 'debate' was recognised, with various practitioners and commentators in the field using the same terms in different ways. It was expected that this would be reflected in the responses to questionnaires and it was felt that respondents should discuss their own definitions wherever possible.

The literature search indicated a bias towards discussing theoretical issues about the practice of experiential learning rather than actual practice itself. There had been no previous systematic investigations into the teaching methods of ACE tutors. Research tended to be local, even institution-bound and more concerned with finding out about the students and their motivations for participating in university-based ACE (for example, see Whitaker, 1984). This small-scale research project appeared therefore to be the first attempt to discover what was happening in university ACE classrooms around the country.

Selection of research methods

In the first instance some indications of the general awareness and use of what could be considered as 'experiential' methods were required. To satisfy this objective, a postal questionnaire was designed to send to tutors in university-based ACE. This was viewed as a quick and efficient way of gaining some initial indication of what was happening, although with the obvious drawbacks of being superficial with little space for the definition 'debate' to surface.

It was felt that the during the second stage of follow-up interviews, tutors could explain their views on the concept of 'experiential learning' and how they interpreted it within their own teaching. The interview schedule would be drawn up based on the results of the questionnaires and those respondents willing to participate further would be considered for interview.

132 copies of the questionnaire were sent to a sample of tutors in 37 universities known to be active in adult education. They were sent via the heads (HODs) of viable ACE departments employing full as well as part-time teaching staff. The larger departments received four copies and smaller ones (with less than 200 courses per year) received two. It was not known who would be completing the questionnaires, the choice of respondents being made by the HODs and not under the control of the researchers.

This technique of 'secondary sampling' was necessary because of the lack of a sampling frame of all full-time staff in UK university ACE. The selection of a true random, and therefore representative, sample was not possible. This sampling technique had been used by Newby (in Bilton 1989) when researching farm workers who were often 'socially invisible' (p.536) with no sampling frame. Newby attempted to sample the farms rather than the farm workers. In this research it was the universities that were sampled rather than the tutors.

Problems of bias and subjectivity inevitably arise from this sampling technique. It could be that the sample was not a typical one with the HODs selecting those who they thought were using experiential techniques, even though requested not to let this be the basis of their choice. Selection could have been made because of availability of certain people, making it 'convenience sampling.'

It is probable that those selected who returned the questionnaire (48%) were more likely to be pro-experiential teaching and concerned to make their views known. These factors were taken into account when evaluating the results.

The mostly closed-ended questionnaire dealt with the use and familiarity with experiential teaching techniques. Respondents were asked to consider what methods could be defined as experiential from a list of eight techniques: role play, simulation, games, practicals, field trips, drama, case studies and exercises, and to add others if necessary.

Frequency of usage was also investigated. There were questions aimed at finding out the main sources of the experiential materials tutors used and the trends in usage, ie. whether they were more or less popular than in previous years.

The nature of the sample

Although there were concerns about the eventual nature of the sample, it was fairly balanced in terms of subjects taught. There was a possible weakness in terms of the length of ACE experience. 42 had been in ACE for 10 or more years, whilst only 12 had been involved for five or less years.

The majority, 50, were familiar with the term 'experiential teaching methods' although several altered this to 'experiential learning'. There was also some agreement about which techniques could be considered as 'experiential' out of the given list. Role play was ticked by 90% of respondents, 89% felt that simulation fell into this category, and 80% included games. This means that there was a degree of convergence in the views of the sample, again pointing to a possible bias of older, more experienced tutors.

The interviews

The structured interview schedule was drawn up on the basis of questionnaire data. 18 interviews were arranged with an effort made to gain a balance of subjects and courses as far as possible. Once again, however, there were more experienced tutors, with no 'new recruits' in ACE. The shortest time any of them had been involved in ACE was eight years and the longest for around 30 years.

Interviews usually lasted around 50 minutes. Most respondents were keen to discuss their teaching experience and practices; they found the interview a rare opportunity to reflect on these. ACE tutors are not often asked about what they do, especially when compared with the school sector. Several respondents, however, did point out the growth in recent years of quality control which meant they were having to be more aware about methodological issues.

The majority claimed to occasionally use an experiential approach but few were using specific role plays, simulations or games to any great degree and these were mainly 'home grown', ie. devised by the tutors themselves. When probed more deeply, only a minority appeared as committed 'experientialists'.

A number of respondents found it difficult to define or to draw a line between experiential and non-experiential. The confusion about terminology and the definition 'debate' resurfaced here. Several had not given much thought about classifying or defining teaching methodologies and method before.

For most interviewees, their ACE teaching had been a 'process of self-discovery, trial and error, taking risks,' reflecting the haphazard manner in which they had entered teaching and had themselves come across experiential techniques. This may have explained their different and sometimes conflicting views about this methodology. They frequently used the term interchangeably with 'interactive', as was previously seen in the literature.

Some appeared concerned that they did not know as much as they should do in this area, and turned the question around to ask the interviewer what experiential methods were supposed to be.

Lack of knowledge about experiential methods appeared as a major deterrent to their use with a great deal of concern expressed about the possible dangers. It was recognised that not all students feel comfortable in experiential situations and, indeed, may feel threatened. Some tutors also shared such anxieties about 'self-exposure'.

It was claimed by many respondents that tutors using simulation techniques without adequate training, preparation and resources could create emotional problems for some adult students. The negative aspects of experiential techniques were viewed as good reason to not use them.

Conclusions

The question of definitions was of obvious importance here. Defining terms is a useful exercise but can be viewed as imposing an order on real-life teaching practices which perhaps does not exist. Researchers often spend a lot of time on methodological and theoretical issues but there is also a need for exploratory work into what is actually happening in ACE teaching.

This investigation, although only using a small and non-representative sample, shows that some of the initial assumptions about widespread, professional use of experiential techniques are not borne out in practice. In general terms, there was no real support in the interview data for the notion of a 'revolution' in teaching methods except perhaps as one that had already petered out.

The information gained provided some valuable insights into university ACE teaching. It has proved useful as a case-study indicating general trends and has led on to a further piece of research which is looking at the attitudes of ACE students to the use of experiential techniques by their tutors.

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Is history different?

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RESEARCH into the history of adult education would seem to have more in common with research into other historical subjects than with research into aspects of contemporary adult education. I have experienced various problems as well as rewards in my research, which has been concerned principally with the university extension movement.

The problems

The problems of carrying out research into people are notorious, whether or not the subjects are still living. Perhaps the main difference in dealing with historical characters is that they are unable to answer back. Although this may seem to be an advantage, it is not necessarily so; it may be more difficult to measure the degree of bias.

Because individuals are 'only human' they may consciously or unconsciously project a particular angle on an event in which they were involved; this can be exaggerated with the passage of time and come to be accepted as the 'truth' about a particular situation.

An example used by E.H. Carr illustrates this very effectively. Gustav Stresemann, Foreign Minister of the Weimar Republic, died in 1929, leaving a vast amount of paperwork which his secretary Bernhard then sorted out. Eventually three 600 page volumes were published. At the end of the war the Allies photocopied the entire Stresemann papers. It turned out that the documents Bernhard had selected were those concerning Stresemann's western policy, which had been generally regarded as successful. His dealings with the Soviet Union, although recorded, seemed to have been less so; Bernhard therefore did not select them for publication. Further editing was carried out before a new edition was brought out by an English publisher in which the documents relating to the Soviet Union were even less well represented.

A researcher using this volume would obviously not gain a balanced view of Stresemann's foreign policy, but had the original boxes of documents not survived this could never have been proved. Carr also pointed out that even before the weeding was carried out by Bernhard, the picture of Stresemann's time as foreign minister was not a complete one. He himself, when recording conversations, described them in such a way as to suggest that he had presented cogent arguments while those of the people he spoke to were far less convincing.[1] The 'genuine' Stresemann memoirs had thus in effect been censored three times before publication: once by Stresemann himself; once by his secretary and once by the English publisher. Propaganda need not involve the active spreading of a particular view or doctrine, it can also be achieved by selection. Perhaps in this respect history is different in that the passing of time and generations serve to compound and strengthen versions of the 'truth'; there are usually less means available to verify what actually happened. The constant, overriding fear of historical research has to be that one vitally important fact can so easily be missed. One small item can overturn a complete theory. There is an element of chance involved in the survival of certain historical documents. In historical research, too, it must be remembered that many sources are used for purposes totally different from those for which they were originally intended. This is very different from research in the social sciences when, for example, a questionnaire will be designed specifically to produce certain data.

It is necessary to step back and consider the background of any document — why it was written, when it it was written and by whom. The fact that this procedure should be second nature does not mean that it is always carried out; it can well be overlooked if at first reading the contents of a document apparently fit a particular theory. This also applies to oral evidence. In both cases, even where a sincere attempt is made to present a fair picture of a personality or event, the 'witness' can only describe what he perceived as having happened; similarly, when attributing motivation, he will be influenced by his own feelings.

I have experienced this in my own research. While attempting to establish the possible importance of the influence of individuals in the field of adult education in the crucial post-war years, I looked at the work of a somewhat controversial figure, S.G. Raybould, and his time as director of extra mural studies at the University of Leeds. Various discrepancies arose. One example concerned the encouragement he gave colleagues to get their work published; those who liked Raybould believed his motives were purely altruistic; those who had a less favourable opinion of him believed he acted from reasons of self-interest, so that he could bask in reflected glory. No-one can state categorically what his true motives were; it is likely that they were complex.

In dealing with people, even historical characters there is a danger of becoming emotionally involved with a particular individual. The problem can develop in various ways, all detrimental to the objectivity of the research. One might admire certain characteristics of the individual being researched; this can lead to treating the subject in a heroic manner — to praising his strong points and underestimating his weaknesses. The opposite can happen — researchers studying an individual they find abhorrent may fail to acknowledge the importance of any mitigating aspect of his character. This failure to look at the subject objectively can occur subconsciously. Although such a problem could well arise when dealing with living people, it is less likely to get out of hand; the characters themselves may step in to keep the records straight.

When dealing with historical characters it is also only too easy to be judgemental: to be guilty of what E.P. Thompson has called 'the enormous condescension of posterity [2], to censure individuals for the way they acted. It is vital to bear in mind the contemporary circumstances, beliefs etc. and not criticise them using today's standards. In this respect history *is* different; we can surely never know as much about life in former times as we do about that of our own, however much we immerse ourselves in background material. It is inevitable that assumptions will be made; the danger is in assuming that our society and values are superior to former ones.

Consciously or unconsciously, the historian will gradually build up a 'picture' in his mind of his own particular subject which may well be influenced by the time in which he himself is living. Over the years his individual picture may become more and more fixed and vivid so that it is difficult to visualise an alternative image. This may explain why few historians undergo dramatic changes of mind about their subject.

Hypotheses and theories

There is also the question of establishing aims and objectives from the start. This done, the decision must be taken whether to stick rigidly to these boundaries, or whether to allow them to be stretched. This would apply to any kind of research, not only that based on a historical subject. It is only too easy to be side-tracked from the original purpose and to waste a great deal of time on peripheral matters. It may be, however, that while researching one area, the greater importance of a side issue becomes apparent. In such a case it may be decided to concentrate on this area in greater depth than had been anticipated. Many historians believe the value of beginning work with a specific hypothesis lies in the other questions which it may raise as much as in a rigid application of the original theory. If the original research has been specifically funded, of course, it is unlikely that it will be possible to change course or modify the direction the work is taking.

Some researchers believe that all historical material can and must be tied into a definite framework, or that only by linking it to a theoretical base will it achieve any real meaning. Opinion on this must surely remain divided. There would seem to be a case for providing a chronological account of particular events or aspects of history simply for its own sake; though of course then there is the temptation to think that because one event succeeded another it was caused by it. According to Tawney, 'Time, and the order of occurrences in time, is a clue but no more; part of the historian's business is to substitute more significant connections for those of chronology.'[3] It is these 'more significant connections' which form the basis of so much debate among historians.

There is too, a well-supported view that history is simply what is written down. In research into some scientific subjects, it is possible to present results in a straightforward, perhaps tabular form. With historical research, the presentation of results is often essentially a persuasive essay, however balanced a view the researcher may have sought to achieve.

Other problems

Total absorption in one's work can prove hazardous. It is possible to lose track of the real world when a lot of time is spent in the cloistered atmosphere of a university library. Enthusiastic announcements about the progress of the research are soon greeted only by polite, glazed expressions on the faces of friends and family.

It could be claimed that in a time of financial restraint expenditure on a subject such as the history of adult education is less 'worthwhile' than on others and is more difficult to justify.

The rewards

The rewards of research into historical subjects, must, I believe, be similar to those experienced in other kinds of research. There is tremendous satisfaction in discovering a previously unknown piece of evidence and of following up various 'clues' and filling in missing links. It is difficult, if not impossible, to describe the sheer wonder at actually handling items of particular significance. In my case the most exciting was a history of the WEA presented to its founder, Albert Mansbridge, in 1924 and signed by the great and the good in adult education. Important discoveries will not, of course, necessarily involve any famous individuals, but will be valuable for their contribution to the research.

There is an additional benefit; it is inevitable that while studying a particular topic in depth one will gain an insight into far more than the narrow field under investigation; some would argue that such knowledge is never wasted. Perhaps it is only a step from acquiring such an insight into a different way of life to picking up a suggestion of an explanation of why certain things happen as they do today. This would seem to be a dangerous area, though Carr asserts that 'we can fully understand the present only in the light of the past.'[4] The traditional purpose of studying history 'to divine the future' does not seem as directly relevant in the field of adult education as in such areas as international relations, but even in the latter case the argument is somewhat unconvincing.

Conclusion

I hesitate to conclude that in some respects history *is* different from other types of research in the field of adult education; in other respects there are marked similarities. All types of research demand thoroughness and objectivity — all, it seems, can be influenced by one's own feelings and by those of the subject or witnesses. In all cases the selection of particular 'facts' and the omission of others can slant the outcome of the research. In all cases it is possible to start from a particular hypothesis and attempt to prove or disprove it. In all cases, too, it is presumably possible to become so totally engrossed in one's work as to become an extraordinarily boring person.

On the other hand, there are marked differences between historical research and other types. Bias on the part of historical characters is harder to detect; the passage of time tends to establish information as 'factual'; we can never know as much about former generations as we do about our own. There is more likelihood of missing a particular item in a historical context; the longer ago the period being researched was, the less likely it is that there will be other information available to confirm or challenge any particular finding.

Finally, I would like to emphasise that although numerically the problems of research, particularly historical research, seem to outnumber the rewards, overall the rewards far exceed the problems.

FOOTNOTES

[1] E.H.Carr, *What is History?* second ed., Penguin, 1987 pp16–19

[2] E. P.Thompson. *The Making of the English Working Class,* Penguin ed. p.12

[3] R.H.Tawney, *History and Society,* Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978, p.54

[4] E.H.Carr, *What is History?* p.55

Discussion groups and researcher bias

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IN January 1992, I began some research into the public perception of changes in higher education. In my previous job I had become familiar with the use of discussion groups, or focus groups, and felt that it would be a useful research method to explore these perceptions. In this way I could characterise and illustrate what certain groups felt, but I would not generalise.

An initial reason for adopting the discussion group method was that I could put my own perceptions aside and sit in amongst a group of people who would stimulate each other to explore their perceptions. I expected my role to be minimal and unobtrusive. I was there only to keep control of the group — be aware of group dynamics; stop break-away conversations; control digressions and dominant speakers; ensure the best possible conditions for tape recording. By adopting the use of theoretical sampling whereby data is jointly collected, coded and analysed, and with the use of thematic and comparative analysis, I was able to control problems of interview and sampling bias. The previous group determined where to go for the next group by either explicitly stating or implicitly inferring. The groups themselves would raise issues which they felt were important and probe each other for further information. Groups were compared, transcripts analysed, themes were developed and the research moved forward smoothly. I kept a comprehensive research diary, documenting my thoughts and reflections on the method as the research progressed. However, I was soon to realise that these issues of interview and sampling bias were only the tip of the iceberg. The whole area of my own personal bias had been overlooked.

Two particular incidents stopped me in my tracks. One concerned a group of people with disabilities, the other a group of manual council workers. In the first incident I had decided to speak to a group of people with disabilities as disabled access had been mentioned previously. Before I began this research I had considered myself to be quite 'sound' and politically correct and it came as quite a shock to realise that this was not the case. An excerpt from my research diary illustrates the problem:

> Today I had a discussion group with a disabled group. I went into the office and was met by a woman in a wheelchair, two men with cerebral palsy, a man on the telephone and another man reading a newspaper...I am not proud of myself — I thought I was not a prejudiced person to any group in society, but I obviously am...I automatically presumed the man on the telephone was in charge and the person to talk to because his disability wasn't visible...I remember looking at the two men with cerebral palsy and wondered whether they had just popped in for a cup of tea. I looked at the other man with no visible disability and presumed him to be the minibus driver. What can I say? I'm not happy with these presumptions or with my thoughts when preparing for the meeting, eg. what language am I using for the questions? Will they be able to understand me? The implication obviously being that people with disabilities are less intelligent than able-bodied people.[1]

The other incident, at first, appeared not to be connected with this, but with careful reflection I realised that both situations had arisen from my own unconscious perceptions about those particular groups of people. A quotation from my research diary illustrates this second problem:

> Yesterday I had a discussion group with manual workers from the council. It was a bit uncomfortable, there was definitely a 'them and us' situation which has not been so obviously present in other groups. I seemed to be viewed as a 'them' and I think some of the group regarded me with suspicion. There was a direct attack on me from one of the men who said he could tell I was a student or lecturer or something like that by what I was wearing, a flimsy dress and sandals. I thought I had dressed appropriately for the group in clothes I don't usually wear — a Marks and Spencer dress and British Home Store sandals. It was a hot day.[2]

It was my preconceptions which prompted me to dress this way — I thought it was an appropriate outfit for the group. Similarly other preparations for the group were carried out under these preconceptions — how was I to conduct myself; what questions were appropriate? The role of the researcher in discussion groups is crucial and if she or he is not comfortable with that role the participants will pick it up and react accordingly, as happened with these manual workers. The groups which ran the most smoothly were with white, middle-class participants, whether female, male or mixed. Obviously other factors are important in their success, but with hindsight I believe it was especially due to my feeling comfortable with the group because of my preconceptions. The members of the group as a consequence appeared to be comfortable with me.

These realisations came only after careful reflection through writing in my research diary and by filling in contact summary sheets after each group[3]. Initially I attempted other explanations for groups not running as smoothly as I had hoped for, as Evans (1989) notes:

> … people may well be unaware of the fact that their decisions are subject to bias and become adept at constructing rational sounding explanations after the event.[4]

As I gradually became more aware of these personal biases I was able carefully to consider my thoughts and actions before, during and after each discussion group. Unfortunately I found very little help in the Social Sciences literature. Cognitive and Applied Psychology publications covered the role of bias in quantifying judgements and human reasoning, but were too theoretical. American market research publications mentioned moderator bias in research groups and advocated psychotherapy or sitting in on at least two hundred discussion groups as a training programme[5]. Mclaren (1991) stated 'it is important...that the field researcher not use the field as a site for his or her psychotherapy'[6]. This is true for a researcher once in the field, but personal biases can and do affect research and researchers must therefore be able to understand themselves and the influences in their lives which affect what they do, their motives and their thoughts. This point puts me in mind of a woman in a discussion group who said that we should stop looking at others and look at ourselves instead. Due to time and financial constraints it is often impossible for a researcher to consider sitting in on two hundred focus groups as training for their role as moderator. Psychotherapy is not as popular here as in the States, and again time and financial constraints mean it is not an option open to many researchers. I found self-awareness increased through careful reflection and personal honesty. As happened with me, researchers might not like what they find, but revelations should be viewed in a positive light and seen as part of the personal learning process, important for self development. As Cottle (1982) noted when researching families living in inner city areas:

> Encounters, implying as they do mutual acknowledgment of persons, must affect our sense of identity, for they cause us to become reacquainted with ourselves.[7]

As the research progressed I became aware of another potential problem which could, again, be reflected in my behaviour before, during and after discussion groups. It concerned a need for consistency of results, as Kennedy (1976) notes:

> Unconscious pressures to bias a group discussion are most powerful during the later stages of a study, particularly when the initial sessions have been highly consistent in their implications. When a group threatens to act in a way which is at variance with research-based expectations, and promises to present us with unexpected and unwelcome analytical and interpretive headaches, our unconscious impulse is to nip this insurrection in the bud — or as a last resort, to tune out, or reject such a group as 'oddball'.[8]

I was aware that these impulses could manifest themselves in various ways, and again, awareness and recognition were the first steps to control. I watched out for probing favourable comments and ignoring those which did not follow existing patterns. Tapes were transcribed fully, including my own comments so that I could watch out for leading questions and treat responses with caution. I studied body-language and neuro linguistic programming to help me become more aware of my reactions and gestures, along with those of the participants. During analysis I tried to treat all transcripts and comments equally, attempting to be faithful to those who had taken part in the research and not mis-represent what they had said. I recognised that the work was highly subjective — what I attached importance to another researcher might not have. I attempted to be honest with the reader and describe the subjective nature of the work, pointing out areas which could have been affected by personal biases.

In conducting research on women and their working lives, Griffin (1991) was accused of carrying out biased work because it only concentrated on women, yet many famous studies have only used male participants and not been labelled biased. This led Griffin to note:

> Those approaches that are labelled as unbiased usually are associated with the forces that maintain existing sets of power relations in society.[9]

I believe we all need to reflect on our research practices and address these issues of personal bias in a constructive way so that researchers like Griffin do not have to face criticism alone. I have related these issues to discussion groups because that is where my experience lies, but there are implications for all qualitative work. Literature on these issues is scarce. I therefore welcome the opportunity to reflect on personal research experiences with interested colleagues in a workshop. The following is a list of questions which colleagues may wish to consider. Please ignore the biased nature of the questions — the list has been developed from my own personal interests and observations.

- (1) Have other researchers recognised personal biases influencing their research? If so, to what extent? How did they recognise them? What steps did they take to control them? What advice can colleagues give on the recognition and control of personal bias?
- (2) To what extent do personal biases affect the research process? Are these issues purely concerns of qualitative researchers or are there implications for quantitative work? Are some research methods affected more severely than others by personal bias?
- (3) Do certain types of background and life experiences have more influence on the research process than others? Are these personal biases more prominent when meeting with groups with whom we have had little or no contact in our lives? If this is so, given the personal profiles and backgrounds of most academic researchers, what are the implications for future research?

Footnotes

1. Personal Research Diary, 1992–1993, p.12
2. Personal Research Diary, 1992–1993, p.15
3. Contact Summary Sheets are discussed in Miles and Huberman (1984), p.50
4. See Evans (1989), p.113
5. See Higginbotham and Cox (1979) *Focus Group Interviews* for full discussion on these issues
6. Article by Mclaren, in Shaffir and Stebbins (1991) *Experiencing Fieldwork*, p.162
7. Aticle by Cottle, in Burgess (1982) *Field Research*, p.127
8. See article by Kennedy, in Higginbotham and Cox (1979) *Focus Group Interviews*, p.84
9. See article by Griffin, in Shaffir and Stebbins (1991) *Experiencing Fieldwork*, p.114

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A becoming of gatekeepers

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> *Gatekeeper:* one who has charge of a gate
> *Gate:* an opening in a wall for entrance and exit, with a moveable barrier for closing it; also, in founding: the little spout in the brim of casting ladles. — *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*

EVIDENTLY we 'need' gatekeepers to manage the social construct known as research, perhaps for sociological as well as for political and economic reasons. It may help to think of them as the managers of little spouts but it does not take the power away. How do we come to acquire gatekeepers in the loosely formed and weakly framed field of continuing education research? What do they do for and to us?

Who and what is the researcher?

We had better begin by reminding ourselves what research in continuing education is. There are multiple answers, as there are to the question 'what is continuing education?' I suggest that 'research' is a convenient and necessary professional artefact.In continuing education, it is still an evolving social construct with which to order and contain an area of work of increasing salience to the institutions that employ us and to our own self-concepts and ambitions.

If this can be agreed, it clears the way to acknowledging something else. In development-oriented adult education, as represented and promoted for instance by the International Council for Adult Education, there is a clear ideological position, a position often supported and replicated by others in AE research. From this perspective 'research' appears also as another name for mystification and for the creation and control of powerful legitimated knowledge.

We do not necessarily always use the same words as ICAE — participatory research. Other terms also emphasise such characteristics as the subjectivity, provisionality, context and groundedness of 'scholarly knowledge', and the value and validity of other people's and other kinds of knowledge. We assert that adults' classes are often research groups. Questions of ethical validity and utilisation also come into the consideration. There is then other knowledge and other research than that which is funded by research councils and produced in universities. Questions of definition, creation, ownership and control of knowledge are presented with particular sharpness in adult education, with its emancipatory traditions and its rhetoric of empowerment.

Why do we need gatekeepers? How do we allow them to emerge? Why do we allow them to exercise power (maybe we cannot prevent it?) and authority (which we maybe bestow upon them). All this has a special interest, not to say poignancy, in the adult education community.

We might pause, indeed, on the word community. Are gatekeepers a negation of community in AE, or a demonstration of its maturation — and/or of its external recognition? Gatekeeping is a political issue among academic tribes in general[1]. It has a different ideological edge in a field of practice whch does not claim to be a discipline and, at least in Britain, is divided over being a scholarly activity rather than a movement. SCUTREA, incidentally, is at the leading edge of the gatekeeper-making business.

Becoming a research person

I came into research and into the education of adults simultaneously and coincidentally. A voluntary exile from the tribe of historians, I wandered into the sociologists' camp, enjoyed their discourse but never signed up. Meanwhile doing adult education (first by chance, then by choice) I began to build an academic-cum-development 'career' in teaching and research in adult education, and became a research person and a practitioner researcher.

The same informing purposes which kept me in AE also oriented me to participatory, action-oriented kinds of research — black inner city residents in Leeds and Aboriginal activists in Australia partly co-owned the process of what the employer saw as my research projects, products and results, though their names only seldom appeared, one must admit, on the published papers.

I also signed up almost unwittingly for the union of teaching and research, teaching as research and research for and as teaching. It took me a long time to recognise how and why I had bought into and internalised this holy union, and I still find myself confused and conflicted over it. At the same time I rejected the sociologist's pure research as promulgated 'internally' at Leeds — studying the ants in the anthill — acknowledging that I too was an interested ant[2].

Researchers are held to mature and age differentially in different disciplines – maths and music at one end, history at the other. Is there a classic career and career profile for the ill-established field in which we practise? Answers to such a question must be culture- and context-specific. I think that in North America AE research now approximates a normal academic field, with recognisable roles and career progressions. It is also, I believe, far more scholarly, alias dissociated from practice and from politics, than is AE research in Britain.

Gatekeeping research

If this is correct the coming of age of CE research in Britain ought to mean that research careers, career progression and research gatekeepers will emerge naturally as tribal elders. The radical and practitioner AE traditions might however suggest otherwise. Conservatism would be normal and natural among gatekeepers. Ageing radicals and no-longer-Young Turks will grow up and behave 'responsibly', or be marginalised. A natural pattern would be for influential elder statesmen (maybe eventually -persons) to exercise control, to express more widely the shared tribal norms, and to sustain the CE research community's values and its place at the dining table alongside other 'disciplines'. 'Mainstreaming' our research means getting a seat at that table, where currently Research Assessment Units numbered 1–72 are allocated places by the Funding Council.

What are the main gatekeeper roles and how are they being exercised? The following list provides just a starting point.

- editorship of journals, edited book series and individual volumes
- easy opportunity for authorship of books and book reviews (the Matthew effect – unto them that hath it shall be given) and to influence who else will get such opportunities
- refereeing of journal articles and book proposals for editors and for publishers
- refereeing applicants for jobs, at least from research assistantships through to chairs
- selecting or excluding candidates and potential candidates for research degrees
- mentoring, 'adopting' and promoting the interests of potential researchers in a proactive way
- acting as adviser or consultant when the field is being scanned for likely candidates for appointment
- serving as adviser or external member to selection panels for appointments where the choice is made
- serving on research body committees and panels to determine who gets research grants
- serving as referee or adviser to research bodies in relation to research grant application
- serving on review bodies and otherwise advising institutions on resourcing and other arrangements for research and related activity in the adult continuing education field
- advising Government, direct or via eg UFC or HEFCE, on research allocations as against other CE expenditure, and as between different research bids
- public authorised representation of the AE research community's interests to Government bodies and quangos
- informal lobbying and influence with Government bodies, quangos, research councils and charitable bodies, etc., as a 'champion' of AE
- external examining and related activities (moderating, quality assessment) in relation to higher degree study and examination
- infiltrating other tribal camps and influencing their attitudes to AE research (eg. Sociology, Education, the Development field).

This list is about CE *research*. Given the practitioner base of the field in Britain it is not easy to split off research promotion and gatekeeping from the representation and promotion of ACE itself, with Government, industry and their agencies as well as in the broader national community. A glance at the role and work of the national institute, NIACE, immediately illuminates this.

This suggests a further point to add to the list:

- representing CE research to the AE practititioner community and counteracting scepticism and hostility there.

Still less tangibly there may be, in conservative, traditional, heavily networked and controlled British society another element: being a good chap (usually) in the places where institutionalised research is allowed to live or die, so that there is a favourable orientation to the field as 'sound', 'worthwhile', perhaps even 'respectable' – part, in short, of the academic establishment.

This list should be disturbing. One question is how far the gatekeepters control access, open as well as close the gate for the sector as a whole rather than just for individual researchers and research groups. Is it a sectoral or a particular interest that gets promoted? Is it possible to distinguish and judge? Research opportunities go in the end to individuals and groups, not to the field at large. Perhaps the field does gain most from the promotion and success of its best players.

Facilitation

The emphasis so far has been on gatekeeping: exercising control over who enters the grazing paddock, but also building access to the paddock and seeking to ensure that the gate can be opened. Thus gatekeeping slips into facilitation and into a more or less vigorous quest for sector resources. It means fighting for resources in the broad external environment as well as influencing who gets them within the club.

There is another side to facilitation: the creation of a supportive and creative 'internal environment' for research within our institutions. There is still a gatekeeping element, or maybe we should simply call it patronage, of the kind exercised for better or for worse by chairs of departments and heads of groups. There is also a more subtle aspect: the creation of a supportive collegial environment in which (especially young and other less confident, less established) researchers feel able to be bold, to take risks, to do something untried and different, with a sense of excitement and support rather than threat. This applies to research assistants and research students as well as to fully fledged researchers. It applies also to teachers in the AE field generally, whose job conditions may be arranged to make research feasible or impossible; and to the way they are encouraged to see their job, and to see 'research', as something manageable, meaningful and accessible, or as something difficult, remote and esoteric – something not for them.

Sustaining a research environment can mean raising money for IT, or winning a local battle for accommodation. It may mean seeing that conference and other travel opportunities get shared out. It may mean setting up an effective mentoring system, and ensuring that official appraisal systems build rather than inhibit personal confidence and professional growth. It may mean instituting buddy systems or quality circles, and normalising open research-sharing opportunities instead of combat-field academic 'seminars' where the confident demolish the weak. It will involve other aspects of good general management such as listening, modelling, being open and firm, planning for succession, etc. It will mean fostering teamwork rather than rampant competitive individualism, while honouring rather than resenting the virtuoso performance.

The specificity of gatekeeping in continuing education

Virtually everything suggested above about gatekeeping and facilitation could be generalised to scholarly endeavour in all fields, although the requirements and conditions of big science make the context very different there. The barefoot nuclear or astro physicist is less plausible than the barefoot AE researcher. Labs and big machines apart, where does the CE field differ?

It may be that shifting from 'adult' to 'continuing' as I have deliberately done provides a simple answer. 'Mainstreamed' CE research on 'mainstreamed' CE sits us down at the ESRC table with other education and social science researchers. Now we need to publish our papers in the right journals and win our spurs and our funds.

If however the values and traditions of AE (as in 'radical adult education' and the International Council for Adult Education) continue to infuse the work, then gatekeeping and facilitation are more problematic, and remain more difficult, than in more conventional fields of scholarship. The gatekeeper loyal to these traditions will not become desensitised to questions about the nature, creation and ownership of knowledge. Such a gatekeeper will not forget that academically and professionally legitimated knowledge disempowers others, whole communities and nations as well as individuals[3]. Whatever the term or epithet – liberal or reformist, radical or incremental – the applied, practitioner, utilitarian, as well as the democratic, participatory whiff of old-style AE will linger on, and will influence the way gatekeeping is practised and facilitation pursued.

Whether this should and does still happen may be a matter for discussion. The sixty-four dollar question which this paper leaves unanswered is who are the CE gatekeepers, how do they come to be legitimated, and how and with what effect do they play their gatekeeping roles?

FOOTNOTES

1. The term belongs to Tony Becher, *Academic Tribes and Territories* (SRHE and Open U P 1989).
2. The reference is to Professor Grebenik's view that sociologists' involvement with their research matter should be no greater than that of the (human) observer of ants in the anthill. It was possible to see light between Grebenik's and the Leeds extramural sociologists' respective ideological positions.
3. Recall the work of Ivan Illich, but also the protracted debate about modernisation and the impact of linear western-driven models on non-western societies.

The lone adult-education researcher: reflections on method and practice

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THE purposes of this paper are to describe and critique the pattern of 'lone' research activity which has evolved over my relatively short career as a university adult educator. After sketching a context for my remarks, I will trace the development of my preferences in scholarly inquiry and then pose questions for SCUTREA participants.

Defining *lone* has been a challenge because we academics are all, to varying degrees, solitary in our scholarly efforts, even when our projects list multiple investigators. So I adapted language from the literature of self-directed learning in order to characterize the lone researcher, using myself as example: someone who, without benefit of ongoing, face-to-face, informed discussion with one or more persons of similar academic preparation and inclination, makes all the major decisions about a line of research; that is, chooses the topic or question; how, when, and where to examine it; the pace, sequence, and intensity of the work; how much to expose and scrutinize his/her assumptions and biases; the selection and integration of others' prior work; the outside expertise to be sought; the first evaluation of the project's cohesiveness and worth; and the manner of reporting to decision-makers (funders, personnel review committees).

Local context

UNC Charlotte is one of 16 public universities in the state system. The Charlotte area, one of the fastest-growing urban areas in the United States, has about a half million inhabitants.

I am UNC Charlotte's first (and only) full-time, tenure-earning faculty member in adult education, hired five years ago not only to do teaching (master's students), research, and service, but also for

> performing program administration and coordination functions, advising students, directing theses/projects, providing leadership for Adult Education and the adult student within the University; work[ing] closely with personnel within the University, with other universities within the system, and with community and industry leaders . . . (*Chronicle of Higher Education*, 1988, p. B8).

The Department of Teaching Specialties comprises 10 faculty in special education, four in reading education, three in research methods, one in English as a Second Language, and one (me) in adult education. They and the 60 other faculty in the College of Education and Allied Professions are primarily engaged in preparing personnel for positions in child and youth education.

Adult education carries no certification in North Carolina. Most of my students already work with adult learners, in corporate or government-agency training, community college literacy and support programs, health education, and consultancy.

Preparation

When I was hired by UNCC, I had just completed my Doctor of Education in adult and higher education at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. I had entered UMass with a practitioner background — six years of coordinating off-campus credit courses for a small community college in Arkansas. In those six years ('lone' in an office 65 miles from the college) I had earned my master's in higher education, ventured into basic survey research, published my first refereed article, and made two conference presentations.

At UMass I discovered adult higher education as a discrete, interesting, but not widely understood subfield of study and practice. Feeling driven to establish a sense of context, I undertook, along with classroom courses, a lengthy independent-study project to identify my positions along a variety of perspectives — historical, philosophical, learning style, and others. More solitary work the next year — on two qualifying papers —put me in a frame of mind to tackle dissertation research within a nearby but very complex context, UMass itself.

I wanted to know how responsive UMass was (and could be) to adult — 25 and older — undergraduates. Long respected for serving full-time, traditional-age undergraduates, this 25,000-student institution had had two adult-degree options for about a decade: a University Without Walls program and a general-studies major, the latter offered via the continuing education division. Both were often perceived elsewhere on campus as marginal to the central mission of the institution.

My quest was to locate — all across campus — support for, and usage of, particular practices suited to serving older undergraduates. The initial stimulus for my project was a theoretically grounded publication, *Postsecondary Education Institutions and the Adult*

Learner: A Self-Study Assessment and Planning Guide (1984), which had been designed primarily for use by administrator-led institutional teams in carrying out a campus-wide assessment. More than 200 diagnostic questions, attached to a yes/no/not applicable response format, are offered in such groupings as outreach; admissions, orientation, and advising; curriculum and instruction; academic policy and practice; faculty/staff development; and mission and objectives.

My design goal was an institution-wide self-assessment which could be carried out by a single researcher who would use both quantitative and qualitative methodology. I used the *Guide* as an initial organizing framework and theoretical base for developing survey instruments and open-ended questions. The literature on which the *Guide* was based, including reports from 19 conventional self-study teams at other institutions, provided further guidance.

I developed three pencil-and-paper survey instruments (for samples of faculty and academic advisors and for all department and division heads) and a set of telephone-interview protocols (for heads of support-service units). I modified the question format to measure both attitude ('Are you a proponent of this practice?') and usage ('Is this your [or your department's] practice?'), and added new questions based on the literature.

Of 456 persons I asked to supply information for the study (I included an adult-student component, using a standardized 'satisfaction' instrument), more than 80 percent responded. I manipulated the quantitative data using conventional statistics. I subjected responses to open-ended questions to standard content-analysis procedures.

The resulting dissertation (Greenland, 1988), a hefty tome, is usable as a reference for determining the relative status of, or climate for, particular practices and for tracing the rationale underlying specific recommendations. One of the monographs I extracted from it (Greenland, 1989) won a national award for dissertation excellence.

Reflections

I recall thinking, 'I'll never have an occasion, the institutional linkages, or the concentrated time to do that complex a study again!' (Hindsight reinforces pride of accomplishment but blurs the amount of time and energy invested and the uncertainties encountered).

The dozens of separate steps and decisions along the way enriched my repertoire of possibilities for a career as a university teacher/researcher; none qualified me as 'expert' researcher. I continue to believe that large studies, carefully conceptualized and organized, can be directed by one person, but I'm aware that the impact may not be greater than that of several more compact studies of equivalent total effort. My doctoral research gave me practice in several modes of inquiry, but did not prepare me to move comfortably between a lone-researcher frame of mind and a collaborative one.

I find survey research and its literature challenging and interesting, mindful that my British readers may, if Brookfield's (1989) claim is valid, view survey research and statistical analysis as 'camouflage' for a 'lack of analytical capacities' (p. 302)! My ideal blend of methodologies at present is gathering quantitative data to serve as benchmark or larger context for concurrent or subsequent qualitative components. Although I value both the 'number cruncher' and 'story teller' roles (Alexander, 1986, p. 132), I regard the former as a necessary framer — and perhaps monitor — of the latter.

Transition to the present

My 'lone' program-coordinator background probably figured in my hiring by UNC Charlotte more than did my research agenda. I began my scholarly inquiry there on topics which had immediate application (nature and evolution of master's programs in adult education) or which extended earlier work (self-assessment among professional women in higher education). My largest ongoing study is of first-time-at-UNCC adult undergraduates; I have the cooperation of, and considerable input from, the staff member who coordinates student services for 'nontraditional' students. The study thus qualifies as a tentative move away from purely 'lone' research, and legitimizes the allocation of time to discussions of progress and implications with someone who has a significant investment in (albeit different objectives for) the work.

I was unsuccessful in attracting funding for the above-mentioned projects, even in the in-house grant competitions I have entered every year. Not until the Education reference librarian and I teamed up to propose a qualitative study of graduate students' information-seeking behavior were the institutional coffers opened for research support.

Monitoring research patterns

Reflecting on the ways I have tried to monitor my activity is intended to help me avoid what Bright (1986, p. 102) calls 'bad eclecticism.' I give an extra measure of attention to the knowledge-base context for my work, going beyond the expected topical literature to the broader adult-education agenda-setting pieces, the 'futuring' literature, and refinements of those inquiry skills I value in common with other educational researchers.

I remind myself not to slip into a 'grass-is-greener' outlook about others' joint inquiry. The collaborative studies reported in journals and at conferences may not have been more smoothly conducted, enthusiastically debated, or valued than 'lone' research. As Jones (1986) reminded SCUTREA, those 'sanitized' research reports 'give no real clue as to the doubts, false starts, and uncertainties which accompany any research activity' (p. 35).

I'm more confident in presenting partially completed research at professional conferences. Sometimes the briefest of such interactions serves as welcome formative evaluation.

Much as I'm intrigued by the research-as-self-directed-learning metaphor (Candy, 1991, p. 399), I caution myself first to use it as an energizer and task reminder and then to reconceptualize myself as embedded in a community of researchers.

Additional checks and balances have come to mind as I prepared this paper: I could develop what Bryant and Usher (1986) call '... "an agreement with the self" to set aside time for reflective analysis' (pp. 14-15). Perhaps a journal dedicated just to reflecting on research could be my self-agreed-upon aid.

I can resist the temptation to design overly large projects which lead me to expect too much from them. I can work to change departmental workload policy so that encouraging master's-student research becomes a more recognized use of faculty time and a stimulus to my own and my colleagues' research.

A call for feedback

How do you talk to yourself about your research? Do you have a personal reflection journal or checklist? If the latter, what are its elements?

How do you perceive the lone researcher I have described above? As moving predictably and conventionally along some continuum of professional development and outlook? As behaving in concert with other facets of experience and personality? As clinging too closely to past successes and paradigms?

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Reflecting research practice — from concrete experience to abstract conceptualisation

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Abstract

THIS paper will examine my experiences as a first time researcher. The subject of my research was student self assessment, in which I examined the practices of self assessment within my own institution. This paper will not focus on the outcome of that research, but on the learning process.

I am a Chartered Quantity Surveyor, having gained chartership through professional examinations, where one is trained in a precise manner and there is usually only one answer to a problem. Research appeared very open-ended; you set your own objectives, implement the methodology, analyse the results and draw conclusions. But what if the methodology is not successful? What if the analysis is incomplete? What if...? Surely research is an exact science whereby 2 + 2 = 4? I share with you the feeling of delight when the first questionnaire was returned; the dilemma when the overall return rate was low; the anxiety at each interview; the insecurity and lack of confidence; the frustration at not having written down those ingenious ideas that you always get in the middle of the night; the anger at not always knowing the answer; the fear of the unknown; the hard work! During this discussion of my experiences, I reflect on what I did, and conceptualise on changes I would implement next time.

Learning from experience on aims and objectives setting

The identification of an area of interest, namely student self assessment, was a surprisingly easy decision. An aim was quickly established but difficulty arose over the preciseness of the objectives. Surely the objectives could be very general, and modified along the way? These initial thoughts were contrary to Bell who suggests

> Unless your supervisor advises otherwise, a precise statement of objectives is generally quite sufficient. The important point is not so much whether there is a hypothesis, but whether you have carefully thought about what is, and what is not worth investigating, and how the investigation will be conducted. (Bell 1987).

My supervisor did not advise otherwise and concurred with Bell. In practice though I found that despite having specific objectives it was very easy to digress. Everything I read was interesting because I was researching self assessment, and indeed education, for the first time.

Also, because the subject was unfamiliar I had problems prioritising which areas were important once I had read them. I found that I wanted to write everything down, for fear of missing something out. Bell makes the point that

> It is always hard to leave out publications that may have taken you hours or even weeks to read, but the selection has to be made. (Bell 1987).

So for the next time, I will be researching from the knowledge and understanding of an informed rather than uninformed researcher, which should direct the selection of relevant material. Secondly, unless I hit a firm obstacle, I shall stick firmly to the objectives.

Learning from the methodology: action-based research and questionnaires

Establishing the methodology was relatively straightforward since the research was to centre on my own institution. We had introduced problem based learning within the department but had maintained traditional and formal assessment methods which were paradoxical to student autonomy. I was interested to see if self assessment could be used to assess problem based learning. I identified action based research as being an appropriate method, which has been defined by Bell:

> The essentially practical, problem-solving nature of action research makes this approach attractive to practitioner-researchers who have identified a problem during the course of their work, see the merit of investigating it and, if possible, of improving practice. (Bell 1987).

My first objective was to see if student self-assessment was used within the institution. I sent an initial questionnaire to every member of academic staff, which started with a definition of student self assessment before going into more general questions. The aim of the questionnaire was to see who used it, and to follow up their initial response with an interview to extract more detail. Needless to say I had a few surprises. My first, was at how excited I was when the first few questionnaires were returned. Most of these were negative responses, but the excitement was still apparent.

My next surprise was at some people's response to the questionnaire. I gave a definition of what I meant by student self assessment and I expected respondents to answer the questionnaire with this definition in mind. However some clearly saw the heading of *Student Self-Assessment* and wrote about their interpretation which was commonly peer assessment. Oppenheim describes questionnaire compilers:

> The world is full of well-meaning people who believe that anyone who can write plain English and has a modicum of common sense can produce a good questionnaire. (Oppenheim 1966).

Oppenheim further explains that these qualities will help but not necessarily be sufficient. I carried out a pilot questionnaire exercise but failed to pick up this loophole of peer assessment. Thankfully I learn from experience so next time I need to be more thorough in my questionnaire preparation.

The last surprise that I will share with you was that of a poor response rate to the questionnaire, namely less than 25% returned. The question of why?, is something which I keep asking myself. My abstract conceptualisation leads me to suggest a couple of ideas. In the words of a colleague, 'the institution is suffering from questionnaire-itis and we automatically FIB' (file in bin). Alternatively, to pilot staff before the summer vacation was maybe bad timing. Moser and Kalton (1971), point out that, 'non response' is a problem because the likelihood, repeatedly confirmed in practice, is that the opinion of people who do not return the questionnaire differs from those who do.

Having undertaken research with the aim of producing a response to an existing or potential problem it is important not to generalise. Only a relatively small amount of information was collected which was institutionally based.

> Well prepared, small-scale studies may inform, illuminate and provide a basis for policy decisions within the institution. As such they can be invaluable. There is no need to apologise about inability to generalise, but there would be every need to apologise if data were manipulated in an attempt to prove more than could reasonably be claimed. (Bell 1987).

Learning from the methodology: action-based research and interviews

Preparation for the follow-up interviews followed much the same procedure as for the questionnaires. Questions were devised and piloted and methods of analysis considered. The types of questions I used at the interview can be classified as verbal or open (Youngman 1986). Freedom to allow the interviewee to talk about their experience was important whilst maintaining an element of structure so that the objectives of the interview were met. Wiseman & Aron (1972) liken interviewing to a fishing expedition, and Cohen adds that

> Like fishing, interviewing is an activity requiring careful preparation, much patience, and considerable practice if the eventual reward is to be a worthwhile catch. (Cohen 1976).

My experience draws me immediately to one memorable interview in which I was very conscious of the degree to which my status as a lecturer placed me in a subordinate position when compared to senior management within the institution. I spent all of the 45 minutes allocated time sitting in awe, as a result of which I had no control over the interview experience and we did not get beyond the first of my five questions. I am consoled by Selltiz *et al* (1951) who reminds us that 'interviewers are human beings and not machines'. It is difficult to overcome the problem of status as a first time researcher, but more structured questions may have led to a more productive interview.

It was interesting interviewing people whom I knew within my own department. One member of staff in particular caused me concern when, during the interview itself, I sat amazed at what he was telling me. I immediately formed a subjective opinion of the information being given to the questions I was asking. Gavron (1966) refers to this bias and says that it is difficult to see how in some situations it can be avoided completely, but awareness of the problem plus constant self control can help.

I undertook four more interviews which were more successful than the two to which I have just referred. They were not without slight hic-ups but my anxiety decreased with experience whilst my expertise increased. As a first time researcher, researching within ones own institution was probably a good place to start. I have learnt also that it is important to be as objective as possible, and to ensure that the interview is as productive as possible. Also I would have found using a tape recorder more beneficial than a notebook especially since I cannot write shorthand.

> I always tape interviews because so much happens that I'm not able to attend to at the time and I find that listening to it again brings all sorts of new things up. (Marshall 1981).

Learning by insight, mistake and luck

To you, the reader, it might perhaps now seem appropriate to focus on the results of the research. However the purpose of this paper is to focus on the research process rather than the analysis of the student self assessment results. What I would like to do, therefore, is to turn to the informal learning that I experienced along the way.

> The insights, the discoveries and understanding. The pieces fall into place, and the experience takes on added meaning in relation to other

> experiences (Wright 1970).

It is easy not to write everything down on paper. Some things seem so simple or obvious — how could I possibly forget them? However, after several weeks or months of reading, researching, selecting and analysing, memory becomes faulty. Other researchers suggest keeping a small notebook/ideas book and Calnan (1984) refers to it as 'the most important book you will possess'. A research journal is a separate book to this because the ideas book should ideally be pocket sized and carried everywhere during the research process. It would have been useful for those *flashes of insight* which seem to come to me at peculiar times or in unusual places. Insight, as the word suggests comes from within, it cannot be fed by someone else, which might explain its sometimes unexpected nature. The Gestalt insight theories are centred on the idea that the learner gains insight by seeing for himself the whole conceptual pattern of what he is learning.

> 'Things seem to fit into place' describes the reaction of one learner who has recognised, by thinking and puzzling, the conceptual pattern. (Boydell 1976).

Marshall (1981) describes keeping a small book beside the bed for when she wakes up and everything is clear. In future I will remember that a flash of insight is quick to come, and equally quick to go, so here's to efficient notebook keeping.

As I have said, I did not keep an ideas book but I did maintain a rather large and cumbersome journal. It was a formal book in which I recorded 'what, when, where and how'. (Zimmerman and Wielder 1977). I would have said that the book was irreplaceable but when something so meaningful is stolen in a burglary, you very quickly have to reflect and start to conceptualise on what to do about it. Calnan (1984) refers to the journal 'as the best insurance of preparation; guard it well'. I had rough notes from the interviews which could be re-written and I could start to read the relevant texts again and to make fresh notes. My regret is that for the first time in my life I wrote about my personal feelings and emotions in trying to carry out a piece of academic work successfully — the ups and downs of the research process. Some of those emotions are lost forever. More lightheartedly, I also regret having to re-do a large proportion of the work! The most useful insight to come from the journal experience is that I realise that I do learn by mistake and never again will I maintain only one copy of a journal. I now use a duplicate book which means that I can carbon copy as I write, and store the work in two separate places.

My final reflection on informal learning examines the element of luck. It was bad luck that my research journal was stolen but such is life. It was good fortune that I originally read a book on the research process which at that time meant very little. The book says that 'we all learn how to do research by actually doing it', and now the text makes a lot more sense and has been particularly helpful. Thank you, Ms Bell.

Where to start and where to stop

Having carried out the research and analysed the results, my naïvety as a first time researcher led me to believe that the writing of this article would be the easy part of the process. Lock (1979) examines the question of what makes a good article and answers this by suggesting that 'it is one which has a definite structure, makes its point and then shuts up.'

Further reading however highlighted examples of researchers preparing as many as six drafts before they are pleased with the product. Getting started was a difficult task and Bogden and Biklen (1982) would concur with this when they describe novice researchers as 'big procrastinators'. However it was not only getting started that was the problem, but also the conscious awareness of trying to produce a quality product involved far more than the production of a mere six drafts.

> Where do I start? How do I know when I am finished? What are the criteria by which I judge the product? How do I know if I captured the essence of the phenomenon? Need I satisfy only myself? What exactly is the process? How do I conduct this conversation between subject and medium and translate what I learn into further action? (Berg and Smith 1988).

Berg and Smith were talking about the artist Picasso and the process he went through in order to produce an illustration of a bull. The end product comprised only six lines but to get to those six lines Picasso went through a long process of constantly changing the lithographic image, until eventually, presumably, he was satisfied. The end product bore no resemblance to a bull — except to Picasso. So perhaps, although the end product is important, it is the process and the experience that are far more important than the outcome. After all, we learn by experience and the product is only a small element of that process.

Can anyone carry out research?

What type of person does it take to carry out a successful research project? Is it something that anyone can do or does it require certain qualities and skills? Howard and Sharp have examined this issue and conclude that

> Most people associate the word 'research' with activities which are substantially removed from day-to-day life and which are pursued by outstandingly gifted persons with an unusual level of commitment. There is of course a good deal of truth in this viewpoint, but we would argue

> that the pursuit is not restricted to this type of person and indeed can prove to be a stimulating and satisfying experience for many people with a trained and enquiring mind. (Howard & Sharp 1983).

Having a 'trained and enquiring mind' is something from my experience with which I can concur. However my reflection also shows me that there is more to it than this. Marshall (1981) talks about the relief she feels when finishing a piece of research work and how her usual reaction is to not want to look at it, and to wish she would have done better. Marshall goes on to say,

> And there's a time when I've got to look back on it for some reason, someone prompts me and I eventually pick it up from the desk and feel absolutely surprised and in wonderment at how *good* it is. I think, 'I did that and it's good!' That's important.

Final reflections

Yes, I have enjoyed the challenge; but no, it has not been easy.

I read an article written by a teacher undertaking an Open University Advanced Diploma in Education Management, who was carrying out research within his own institution. He identified that his role as a full-time teacher and part-time researcher, a not unusual combination, (like myself), was at times difficult to reconcile. I am trying to remain a committed teacher whilst taking on the workload of an enthusiastic first time researcher. Calnan (1984) summarises

> The recipe for successful research ... is delightfully simple: hard work and a bloody good idea.

I've done the hard work; let us hope it was a good idea!

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'Hero(in)es of labour': some ethical problems in adult education research

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THIS paper does not attempt to cover the field of adult education research ethics in a comprehensive way. Instead, I am going to concentrate on a number of problems that have arisen within the Leeds Adult Learners at Work project, a 2-year UFC-funded research programme designed to explore the significance of Employee Development (ED) schemes in the private and public sectors for the extension of lifelong learning. As part of this project, detailed case-studies were carried out at 12 sites in the private sector and 3 in the public sector. These involved intensive interviewing of employees, managers and trade union representatives. The main ethical problems that I shall deal with involve the availability of the findings of publicly funded research, and the relationship between the researcher and the researched.

Even to begin to complain about the availability of research findings supposes some notion of a general public interest. I want to go back 25 years to 1968 and the concerns that many of us had then about the links between the universities, industry and the military. In an article in *The Guardian* on 26th September, Raymond Williams broadened the debate to encompass some of my own present concerns:

> But, in this real movement, the right questions seem to me to get asked: not only the local questions about research contracts with outside bodies, or about the giving of money for this, the refusal of money for that. But also, more generally, about who is speaking in the name of society: what real public decision is involved in the giving or withholding of public money; what version of society is implied in what are called educational requirements and standards. I think the student movement has been right to identify the present educational and administrative structure with the values of the bourgeois society which, in the nineteenth century, created it: the rigid selection and distribution of specialised minority roles, as against the idea of public education, in which the whole society is seen as a learning process, and in which, consequently, access is open, not only for people but for all their questions, across the arbitrary divisions of quotas and subjects. (Williams 1993: 245)[1]

At the same time, notions such as public education and the whole society as a learning process, the way Williams uses people in contrast to bourgeois society, seems to me to presuppose a prior political commitment to participatory democracy, and again it is Williams himself who has expressed this most clearly:

> If man is essentially a learning, creating and communicating being, the only social organisation adequate to his nature is a participating democracy, in which all of us, as unique individuals, learn, communicate and control. Any lesser restrictive system is simply wasteful of our true resources; in wasting individuals by shutting them out from effective participation, it is damaging our true common process. (Williams 1961: 118)[2]

It is clear that we do not live in a participatory democracy and that public education is not a shared objective within that society. It is therefore not surprising to find that the kind of objectives so clearly laid out by Williams do not stand the test of reality. It is a commonplace of university education in the 90s that in order to survive universities must seek external funding, especially for research. This is just as true within the Social Sciences as it is in Technology or Science. This in itself is not a bad thing. There are clearly trusts and funds set up specifically to finance and encourage research in the Social Sciences. There are also other public bodies (health authorities, local and national government departments for example) with an interest in particular pieces of research being carried out. Private employers can have similar interests. It seems to me that the crucial point here is not the question of public versus private, or even of who pays, but the question of what is being purchased, and who has access to it. I would argue that it should be the research activity, the commitment to use university resources to seek the answers to a specific range of questions, rather than the results of that research. Let me give an example. During my own research, I became aware of a relevant study being carried out by the Training and Enterprise Department (TEED). It had been contracted to a reputable research institute. What emerged was a bland and uncritical report which highlighted all the benefits and few of the drawbacks of Employee Development. A colleague commented that the latter report was simply a 'publicity exercise', with examples of good practice: a lot more material was generated by this research, and some at least is critical. Yet that material is not in the public domain.

I want to turn now to some of the ethical problems that emerge in field-work research. The theoretical underpinning for this part of my paper is the tension between agency and structure. It is a question of giving due weight to the views of the various social actors in a research site, but taking due account too of the asymmetrical power relationships between them and the social structures in which they are embedded. As Apple has commented: '… the social world, with education as part of it, is not merely the result of the creative process of interpretation that social actors engage …'[3]. In practice, this has direct implications for research. On the one hand the researcher will wish to 'give voice' to those in our society whose voices are seldom heard in social debate; on the other hand the researcher will want to explore in a critical way the views of the social actors and their interrelationships. Further, there is a clear and important difference between the researcher simply recording verbatim the views of social actors, and the educational process in student writing 'when writing dips people down into that unexpected struggle with telling the truth, whatever that happens to be, here and now, and for you.'[4]

There are a number of alternatives to choose from in developing a relationship between the researchers and the researched:

1. Participative research — a co-operative model

In many ways this responds to my own ideal of research as a collaborative effort between researcher and researched, part of a more general sense of a society talking to or amongst itself. However, I am also clear that such a methodology needs to be built into the research plan from day one. At the same time, we have always made it clear hat our commitment as a research team is to the social goal of lifelong learning. This led us to define the research question in ED in terms of the extension of lifelong learning rather than an employer perspective limited (by necessity or choice) to business management considerations. This also led us to acknowledge that public discourse on vocational education and training is dominated by an employer view of the world, and that questions of discourse were an integral part of the research.[5]

2. Giving voice — a self-advocacy model

An excellent example of this was produced by the complementary research project at Lancaster University which looked at the development of Basic Education provision in the workplace in North-West England. Workers from three separate employers spent a residential writing weekend together and produced a book reflecting on their experiences of work and education[6].

3. Giving voice — a promotional model

If the self-advocacy model is characterised by the use of the first person narrative, the public relations model is characterised by the use of the third person, though it may use some direct quotation. This is the characteristic model used by company in-house magazines, but also by the National Training Awards and the NIACE Adult Learners Awards. Photographs of these 'hero(in)es of labour' are often used to emphasise the 'reality' of the achievements of individual workers.In so far as it seeks to enhance the public image of a particular employer it seems a very dubious way of exploiting the learning ambitions of individual workers. In so far as this aims to promote desirable social goals it has a legitimacy of its own. An example would be a local authority which has introduced a Basic Skills course at corporate level and now wishes to introduce a similar scheme in its Parks Department; the story of the one employee from this department who so far has attended the council-wide course is being used in an in-house magazine to promote the departmental scheme.

4. Giving voice — a critical model

In this model, first person material, based on verbatim transcripts of recorded interviews are inserted into a critical commentary which, as suggested above, attempts to seek a balance between agency and structure. This allows the critical use of material gathered during the field-work, but places complete control on the use of material with the researcher. Further, it introduces the whole debate about the relationship between quantitative and qualitative methods, and exposes the research findings to criticism over the typicality of the experiences reported. I was particularly conscious that since almost all interviews were filtered through management, the interviews would tend to give an over-optimistic account of the potential of workplace learning, and under-estimate the difficulties. However, given the extent of critical comments made by employees, I am inclined to think I may have overestimated this problem. Such an approach, with its stress on the use of open-ended questions, gives adequate weight to the different experiences of women and black people in the workplace[7] and it has always been an assumption of the Leeds project that these issues should be treated as central to any analysis of the potential of the workplace in the extension of lifelong learning opportunities.

In conclusion, I have tried to argue in this paper that a research project of this type should seek to give voice to the many social actors whose views are excluded from public discourse on education and training. While there is clearly a place for both participatory research and the type of self-advocacy promoted by the student writers movement, there is also a continuing and vital role for critical social research which uses qualitative methods to balance the competing claims of agency and structure. Both within institutions and within bodies such as SCUTREA, adult education researchers need forums in which issues of method, with their fundamental ethical implications, can be debated.

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FOOTNOTES

1. R. Williams, 'Different sides of the wall', in J. McIlroy and S. Westwood (eds) *Border country: Raymond Williams in adult education* (Leicester: NIACE) 1993, pp. 242-246
2. R. Williams, *The long revolution* (London: Chatto and Windus) 1961. While I always try in my own writing to use non-sexist language, I have not excluded valuable material from any source simply on the grounds that the author, for historical or cultural reasons, has not observed the same conventions as I do.
3. M. W. Apple, *Ideology and curriculum* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul) 1979, pp 139/40. This and related issues in sociology of education and research methodology are explored in J. Payne, 'Doing adult education research', in *Studies in the Education of Adults*, 22.1 (1990), pp. 77-93
4. M. Cooper, S. Gardener and J. Payne, 'Editorial: oral history and student writing', in *Adults Learning*, 2.1 (1990), p.6
5. These questions are examined in a forthcoming article. Like all the substantive findings from the Leeds project, the article will appear as jointly authored by K. Forrester, J. Payne and K. Ward.
6. F. Frank (ed) *Not just a number: writings about workplace learning* (Lancaster: Lancaster University) 1992
7. See also Payne (1990)

Analysing the effectiveness of distance learning methods with 'disadvantaged' groups in continuing education

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Introduction

ALTHOUGH it has existed in one form or another for over a hundred years, it is particularly during the last two decades with the advent of advanced systems of communication that distance education has become established as a teaching/learning mode in its own right. At present the terms 'distance teaching' and 'distance learning' are often used as though they are interchangeable. However, Keegan (1986) suggests that neither of these terms adequately describes what he prefers to conceptualize as 'distance education'. Whatever nomenclature is used, the terms cover the various forms of teaching and learning at all levels which are not under the continuous, immediate supervision of teachers or tutors operating within the same premises as their students. The main characteristic of distance education is that it relies on non-contiguous, ie. mediated communication (Holmberg, 1990).

The rapid expansion of distance education on a world-wide scale has resulted in a vast literature relating to aspects of distance teaching and learning. It is still very much the subject of continuing research and academic debate as influences from research and practice begin to impact upon delivery in different parts of the globe. Much of this research has been concerned with problems of understanding and explaining the circumstances and conditions of distance learning; the result has been various instrumental attempts at improving distance education by facilitating distance students' learning (Holmberg, 1989). However, the value or even the possibility of developing a single, encompassing theory of distance education is open to debate.

One important characteristic of distance education is its ability to adapt and to transform itself into new contexts, for example, in Britain, the prototype of the Open University, offering the opportunity to obtain a degree through the use of multi-media learning packages has been able to re-shape and develop what it offers to a wider clientele — for example, its ventures into continuing professional education, community education and, more recently, 'leisure learning'. Other institutions of higher and further education in Britain have also begun to offer some of their conventional courses through the medium of open and flexible learning including learning at a distance.

This paper seeks to make a contribution to current thinking about distance education through a reflective analysis of my own role as a researcher in an innovative distance learning project. I begin by describing the context of the research and my attempts to develop a reflective approach; this leads to a brief discussion of some of the issues which have emerged from this initial critique of my own practice.

The research context — 'Learning from Home'

The focus of my reflective activity is my role in a two-year UFC-funded research project which came to be known as 'Learning from Home' based in the Office of Adult Continuing Education at Lancaster University. The aim of the research was to examine the applicability of various methods of distance learning to an area of continuing education which has traditionally been labour intensive and only partially successful — 'outreach' continuing education to educationally and/or socially disadvantaged groups in the area served by the Office through its new programme of adult liberal education. At the outset, the dangers of categorising potential students in this way and the multiplicity of meanings which might be attached to the term 'disadvantaged' were acknowledged. However, the evaluation exercise was conceived as a utilisation model in that conclusions reached about the effectiveness of the methods would be used to enable recommendations to be made concerning future policy and practice. In this way, the aims of the project were consistent with two emerging strands of the Office's declared overall research strategy, i.e. to consider outreach strategies to attract those having little or no previous contact with higher education and to explore the effectiveness of open, flexible, distance and self-directed learning in this context.

Developing a reflective approach

It is only comparatively recently that a case has been made for the adoption of approaches based upon critical reflection within research, theory and practice in distance education (Evans and Nation, (eds) 1989; 1993). I want to use the reflective experience in three ways — firstly, to help illuminate whether my activities as a researcher were consistent with my own philosophies; secondly, not as a socially sterile exercise, but to help develop a 'co-operative spiral' which will encourage dialogue, interaction and further personal reflection; and thirdly, to stimulate changes in my practice as a result of self and peer evaluation (Hammond and Collins, 1991). I am aware, as Bright (1992) points out, that reflection-on-action is concerned with the analysis of past situations and therefore obviously involves a distance in time between the action and the reflective process; in this sense, it is a more conscious, deliberate and contemplative activity than reflection-in-action, although they may exist along the same continuum. In my case, it is concerned with exploring both the context in which the research was carried out and my own motives for the courses of action I took — a problem-seeking rather than problem-solving approach.

I am aware, also, that in the process of learning to practise critical reflection, there were points when I experienced resistance to the reflective process in that it seemed a potentially threatening area of self exploration. As an academic and evaluator of other people's learning experiences, I felt a sense of unease in describing and responding to my own experience. In seeking to overcome this negativity, I returned to the extensive research documentation, which included notes of research meetings and an interim report developed in the course of the project as an aid to reflecting upon actual events as they happened, rather than my retrospective interpretation of them. I was also assisted by the 'learning conversations' (Candy et al, 1985) which took place both during and after the project had formally ended with other members of the research team, facilitated by an 'outsider' with expertise in delivering distance learning opportunities through the Open University. Such conversations, which were used for *describing* activity within the project helped me, as a member of the research team, to engage in a constructive dialogue in order to problematize elements of the research process and to face challenges to my practice. However, in participating in these activities, I am also made aware of the values and interests which framed other individuals' thoughts and actions in these specific situations and the nature of the professional and social relationships presumed within the research group (Kemmis, 1985).

Developing a research focus

The nature of an externally-funded research project with finite monies available necessarily implies the need for a tight structure in planning activity. In this case, the time available for developing pedagogy and curriculum and for focusing upon the centrality of the evaluation process guided the conceptual framework which was developed by the research team. The plan was to make use of a range of main modes of delivery, eg. on-air TV and radio, videos of on-campus lectures, bought-in and specially written material — whilst exploring the possibilities of third-generation technology within the financial and technical resources available. In setting up a somewhat ambitious programme of 30 courses of varying length, I became aware that the literature on programme development in distance education draws upon a limited and fragmented tradition and lacks a coherent general theory. The task, then, was to make explicit the critical tasks which had to be faced. As I envisaged them, these related to:

(i) justification of each course and exploration of design possibilities
(ii) development — identifying the kind of materials, support system and interactions which would be appropriate for each course in order to facilitate learning.
(iii) implementation — publicity, recruitment, dispatch of materials and general administration to ensure efficiency in delivery.
(iv) monitoring and evaluation — obtaining regular feedback, developing strategies for integrating change into the programme as it unfolded.

In retrospect, I am aware that implementation issues tended to dominate much of the activity and it was problematic for research team members to learn how to shift the emphasis away from purely organisational matters towards 'what and why' questions which would challenge some of the pre-conceived notions that might have been held about effectiveness in distance education.

Monitoring and evaluating 'Learning from Home'

The nature of student-tutor relationships and the imbalance of power within the relationships is an issue which troubles many educationalists, theoretically committed, as I believe I am, to assisting learners take control of their own learning and become self-directed. In distance education, as Evans and Nation (1989) have observed, the distance teacher's autonomy and power are both circumscribed and enhanced by the context of distance education since s/he controls the 'knowledge package' and structures the process through which this knowledge shall be delivered. At the same time, the notion of distance helps to insulate teachers from students and assists in the maintenance of the power relations between them. In designating our distance learning students 'disadvantaged', a barrier to the enactment of equality in the tutor-student relationship had already been erected.

On the other hand, distance learning necessarily involves students in making sense of course materials for themselves, in reacting to structured learning situations in an active and critical manner, and to some extent in shaping their own learning experiences, especially if tutor support is minimal or nonexistent (Holmberg, 1989). In selecting a monitoring and evaluation model for 'Learning from Home', I wanted to find out to what extent students had been able to achieve these aims in order that I could contribute to improved educational practice. Accordingly, the research design adapted from the description-diagnosis-outcome determination-programme documentation model (Dillon and Gunawardena, 1992), initially used as a research instrument a questionnaire with both open- and closed-ended questions administered during and after each course. I believe my socialisation as an academic researcher who needed to generate data and 'results' and to remain in control of the research procedure initially led to the adoption of this stance.

During the first analysis of returned questionnaires, I became aware that this method was neither offering participants any chance to express their real feelings about the different components of their courses nor generating the kind of feedback I needed to improve programme design. Accordingly, I began to experiment with other methods such as student diary-keeping, group telephone discussions and a face-to-face meeting; these last two methods meant that students were able to interact more readily with each other and that I was able to take part on a more equal footing and to encourage students to themselves reflect upon their motivation and experience. Hammond (1990) describes a similar process in a different setting and goes on to discuss the concepts of 'negotiated research' and 'self-directed research' as a means of demystifying the research process for participants.

As 'Learning from Home' developed, the research team decided to experiment with more interactive technologies, ie. the delivery of a student learning opportunity through computer-mediated discussion. I believe it was a sense of dissatisfaction with existing forms of tutor-student communication and a need to look for more creative methods of programme delivery in a time of rapid technological change which led to the decision to experiment in this way. In keeping with this interactive approach, I invited students to write an account of their experiences both in learning to use their computers for these purposes and in critically analysing the course materials. Through these methods, I hoped to move responsibility for analysing their learning further towards students themselves in keeping with my own philosophies and to give a sharper focus to the evaluation process for my own purposes.

Towards the end of the period of the project, I began to feel that I had developed some grasp of what constituted effectiveness in learning for these students. However, the next stage was to think about ways of mainstreaming the findings of the research into the Office's liberal adult education programme. Deliberating about how best to move from a research focus into a different context necessitated a move towards re-evaluating the perspectives gained from taking part in the research process. As I would no longer occupy a 'researcher' role in relation to a 'researched' population, it was necessary to shift the focus away from 'research' in the sense of systematic inquiry into learning outcomes towards the other identified aspects of distance education programming — course justification, development and implementation. At the level of my own reflective activity, the need to move this focus is currently helping me to question to what extent the concept of 'effectiveness' in distance learning can be equated with 'effectiveness in learning'. Through an analysis of the research programme documentation, which is still to be completed, it should be possible to begin to consider issues other than the teacher/researcher-student relationship and to reflect upon other factors such as student access; involvement with new equipment and technologies; the degree of complexity for the provider; and cost effectiveness.

Conclusion

As a researcher, the experience of reflecting on the Learning from Home project has helped me to clarify some areas of my research activities which were at odds with my beliefs about good adult education practice and has stimulated me to consider some of the broader issues relating to the delivery of distance learning courses. I have also become aware of a range of other issues which need to be addressed in relation to research — how to extend the process of reflection in the kind of action research observed above; identifying and overcoming obstacles to the process of reflection such as the short-term nature and uncertain funding of research; as a female, gender issues in the development of a reflective stance, to name a few. However, if researchers in distance education can at least begin to engage in the process of critical analysis of what they are about, they should be enabled to produce insights into their own beliefs and practices through a re-evaluation of their experiences; and, it is hoped, to begin to address issues which will have a broader relevance for the field.

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3. Auto/biography and life history

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THE papers in this section all deal with aspects of life history writing, or what some sociologists refer to as auto/biography in order to draw attention to the interrelationship between the construction of one's own life though autobiography and the construction of the life of another through biography (see, for example, Stanley, 1992; Stanley and Morgan, 1993). The recent publication of a special issue of *Sociology* (Vol. 27, No. 1, February 1993), devoted to papers on auto/biography, and the fact that the fastest-growing interest group in the British Sociological Association is that concerned with auto/biography give evidence of the the keen interest in this approach to research among contemporary sociologists.

Several of the contributors here refer to this current strand of sociological work, but the papers also derive their insights from feminism (which has itself helped to shape the sociological concerns noted above), history, poststructuralist theory, psychoanalysis, English Literature and work on reflective practice. This diverse set of theoretical bases is perhaps unsurprising in view of the multi-disciplinary nature of adult education research. The recognition of reflection on the researcher's own life experience as central to a review of research processes in adult education is common to all the papers. Whether the writers are offering fragments of their own life history, reflecting upon the process of writing such histories, or revealing self-insights derived from researches into the lives of others, they all testify to the richness and excitement of auto/biographical research, as well as to the uncertainty and discomfort often embedded in such work.

Eileen Fitzgerald Daggett charts her progress through higher education as a mature student, and her recent shift from the role of student to that of tutor. She uses the concept of the 'multiple self' to examine the complexity of her personal experience and identity, revealing some disjunctures between her sense of herself as academically successful and that part of her which retains the sensitivity of her 'raw working-class nerves' and harbours the conviction that one day she will be discovered as an imposter in the academic world. However, she suggests a sense of unity in her desire to continue to learn and to remain a student.

Rennie Johnston gives an account of his development as a researcher and a reflective practitioner, exploring some of the tensions in his move from adult education tutor to full-time researcher, and the insights derived from the process of negotiating research questions and meanings with both research participants and sponsors.

William Jones describes his changing orientation to the process of interpreting questionnaire data from a project evaluating students' experience of a Return to Study English course. He demonstrates how, following a flirtation with 'scientism', he reverted to his earlier identity as a specialist in English Literature, and shows how the poetry of Coleridge can provide insights of great value to the reflective practitioner.

My own paper contains reflections on successive stages in my development as a researcher, and explores the notion of autobiographical writing as active self-construction.

Rebecca O'Rourke reveals some of the unease which has arisen out of her shift from practitioner to researcher; she is conscious of not belonging entirely to the research world, but of being viewed with suspicion by practitioners.

The papers by Mary Stuart and Alistair Thomson, who are both based in the University of Sussex, where the British Mass-Observation Archive is housed, deal with work in the area of oral history. Stuart describes her experience of conducting interviews for the purpose of constructing oral histories, and summarises some understandings she has reached about the slippery nature of the self in social research. Thomson's focus is on a project concerned with adult learning and life histories. He takes note of debates about the validity of oral history methods among historians and questions raised about the 'unrepresentative' nature of data collected through these methods, but argues forcefully for the value of such work and draws attention to the untapped resource of M-O material for adult education research.

Linden West and Fenia Alexopoulou describe their use of research diaries as a form of reflective research practice. They demonstrate how their use of diary writing helped them not only to identify and debate theoretical and methodological issues in their project, but also to negotiate such troublesome territory as that surrounding the unequal power relations between the two of them which arose out of their differing conditions of employment.

The stories told here offer powerful insights into the self-exploration central to so much research in adult education. They provide vivid and often painful pictures of the self-doubt and confusion which is part of the research reality for most of us and stand in stark contrast to the clinical accounts of research methodology often to be found in social science text-books. They are generally interim accounts of explorations in progress, and in highlighting the need for further enquiry and analysis they point to the likely development of a rich strand of auto/biographical work in adult education research to come.

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The multiple self in the unity of adult learning

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MICHEL Foucault tells us that we in the West rely upon confession for the production of truth. He links confession with torture in what he describes as 'a ritual of discourse in which the speaking subject is also the subject of the statement'(Foucault, 1979). The torture produced in this paper is of a personal kind, and is self-inflicted. I must descend into some dark corners of my Self in order to demonstrate to my readers the extent to which I use everything which comes in my way as a tool of research. Generally repressed aspects of my own personality are no exception here. All good research demands risk (Usher & Bryant, 1989), and the exploration of my own position within my research demands that some of the risks I take with my Self are costly. I must begin, therefore, with a confession.

In writing this paper, I have been driven to face an idea that has been lurking within my thinking processes since my academic life began in 1986. This idea leads to a measure of giddiness, placed somewhere between elation at the praise I have received and terror that those who have bestowed that praise will soon find out how wrong they were. Since I first became an adult learner on Southampton University's Return to Study programme (RTS) seven years ago, I have been dogged by a persistent conviction that I have been fooling all of the people all of the time.

From successful completion of two years of RTS at beginners and advanced level, having become adept at dressing my inadequacies in acceptable language, I went on to persuade the University's English department to allow me in as an undergraduate (and me not even knowing what that meant at the time!). This enormously clever sleight of hand has since been outstripped by the fact that they have not only awarded me an honours degree in English Literature, but have gone on to make me a Master of Arts. That I am now actually being paid money to research for a doctorate in the education of adults is one more step on this dizzying ladder that a deeply ingrained part of my psyche is convinced will lead only to exposure.

The person who initiates these thoughts is not Eileen Fitzgerald Daggett, M.A., but 'our Eileen'. She comes from Oldham and is at home in grime and humiliation. She has never really left there — and she is very small. She hasn't got a single thing to say that anyone wants to hear and is much better seen (though the benefits of that are open to question) than heard. This poor little waste of space is curled up and hidden away inside everything I do, but like most hidden things she has tremendous power. She is waiting for me at the bottom of every thought and keeps company with a strange assortment of other selves which she has spawned in her desperate attempt to remain hidden. In the opening to *Landscape for a Good Woman*, Carolyn Steedman, another academic with working-class roots, also tells of the pervasiveness of background:

> I read a woman's book, meet such a woman at a party (a woman now, like me) and think quite deliberately as we talk: we are divided: a hundred years ago I'd have been cleaning your shoes. I know this and you don't. (Steedman, 1986)

These poignant words reveal the raw working-class nerves which often lie just below an acquired intellectual veneer. The pain shouldn't persist in this way, and every professional educator I have encountered has tried to ensure that it doesn't. But, you see, the small beleaguered children don't go away. Reared in a culture where 'they hate you if you're clever and despise a fool' (John Lennon, *A Working Class Hero*) the early put-downs hammer away at self confidence in a way that can never be reversed. Steedman herself belongs to a new academic tradition; she is a scholarship child who moved out through grammar school into university and an academic life. What adult educators in the nineties are dealing with are people, like myself, who didn't make it through that initial process, but went on to lead quite prosaic lives, moving and operating within the culture to which they were born and through which they succeeded in different areas. These people re-enter the education process carrying with them more layers of complexity and difference.

When I drafted my research proposal, I innocently assumed that I was an ideal person to investigate the concept of success when applied to adults returning to study English Literature after a period away from structured education; my own experience inside the process would surely provide a measure of at least one kind of success and supply subjective material upon which to build.

This certainly remains true in practical terms. I am still in touch with the world of the mature student and indeed this paper has been written around the usual interludes with the iron, the hoover and the school gate. But rather than exposing paths into the difficult terrain of research into adults learning, my own academic experience seems simply to have equipped me with the intellectual apparatus to question my position in this bizarre process. Instead of going 'out into the field', it would seem that I must first descend into my Self.

My literary training has taught me how impossible it is to write reality. From an enlightened twentieth century position I can sneer at Rousseau's naivety when he wrote 'I have displayed myself as I was'. The keeping of a reflective diary generally leads to such remarks as 'What kind of creature have I become? I am a Frankenstein's monster out of control.' In my research area I engender myself: the ultimate in nineties individualism. This new person, the doctoral student, must learn to move around comfortably among people from much higher social positions (when you're at the bottom you're not really in any doubt that the class system exists and operates) to accept their respect and even their deference whilst making an attempt at retaining some kind of integrity. This person must also speak to people more nearly like herself who have not pursued their studies and have come to regard her, perhaps rightly, as someone withdrawn from their level by means of her success in an area where they feel themselves to have, if not failed, at least faltered. This doctoral student has become someone who beat the odds which conquered them, the one who found a way through where they didn't. This research will not be like into like, rather an aberration into the norm.

If there is a concept driving these speculations, it is authority, or rather the antinomy which arises when trying to decide where authority lies. There appears to be an idea of an external body of thought; a given world as it is out there, upon which or against which the internal testimony of the Self reacts. The Self then produces ways of knowing, some based on reason, some on emotion, which trigger contradictory but at the same time complementary conclusions.

John Keats wrote in a letter to John Reynolds on the 3rd May 1818:

> ... for axioms in philosophy are not axioms until they are proved upon the pulses: we read fine things but never feel them to the full until we have gone the same step as the Author.

Building upon this thought, I would maintain that adult learners come to the process with internal unarticulated axioms of their own but there has been no shaping external experience to give a formative reflection back. I see my role in adult education as a provider of the intellectual tools which students can learn to use. One main area of exploration is that of alternative systems of values.

So often the world of reason is the male sphere, the external patriarchal world which has traditionally left little space within which woman can operate with her differing set of values and concerns. Woman has therefore become adept at functioning within two closed and discrete systems. The world of adult education, though populated, in the arts at least, largely by women, retains a masculine tradition and structure. The kudos accruing to me with each new letter I can tag onto my name far outweighs any acclaim I may (or more probably may not) receive for mothering my two children. I make no conscious gesture towards valorising the one over the other here, rather I raise these points only to illustrate the contradictions which many adult students in liberal and higher education face. Learners up to twenty-one tend not to need to concern themselves with choices between the spheres. Responsibility to family generally equals self education. Most adult students, however, (of both genders) are continually faced with tension between developing themselves as individuals and their duties to family.

At the time of writing, I feel myself to be more the student than the educator. I have no wish to cross that divide which traditionally separates students from teachers. It pleases me to pass on what I have learned but not to do this in any authoritative way. I chose to present students with what has been shown to or discovered by me. I am aware, of course, that neither the material nor the presentation can ever be neutral or passive, yet within the classes I have had the pleasure (and terror) of leading, my main aim has been to bring out students' already existing knowledge and to allow them to watch their own ideas being dealt with by the group, 'proved upon the pulses' of collective and individual reaction.

I have come to teaching through the patient help and support of those who have known me throughout my academic career. It is their belief in me that has given me the courage to stand before a class of adults and exchange ideas with them. In many ways I feel that it is vital for my research that I maintain a sense of innocent participation, yet the stresses between authority and learner are often revealed and prove to be my single most difficult area of participation and at the same time the most rewarding. For those attending the class too, this approach places perhaps too great a burden on them. Generally speaking, adults attend a class to be told things, not asked them.

English literature is the only area in which I feel myself competent to speak. It is intrinsically different from, say natural history, where the tutor's experience may well outweigh that of the class. English literature deals with questions of morals, politics and value which each individual must explore for themselves, having had specific problem areas pointed out to them by the tutor.

My readers may well be asking themselves where the concept of unity, promised by the title of this paper, can be located. In a deeply personal context, I perceive unity to lie in my determination to remain a student. In any group of adults there exists a pool of knowledge greater than any individual within this group can contain. My role as leader of the group is conferred by a consensus that I may know more in one specific area than the others present. They have assembled there as a result of an agreement to listen to me speak about it, and to exchange ideas within my given area of expertise. The study of literature is a facilitating mechanism which allows individual members of the group, (including the leader) to explore the extent of their own knowledge (and blind spots) not only in the literary area, but also in life experience in general. This personal view is perhaps a product of my own peculiar background but it does nevertheless appear to me to be a valid view of the processes at work within adult education. The past of the group of people in any adult education class is certainly pertinent to the outcome of the learning experience which that group produces. It is this phenomenon which leads me to assert my determination to remain a multiple self within the unifying experience of any adult education group.

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Becoming more reflexive as a researcher

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IN this paper, I want to focus on two stages in my development as a reflective practitioner and researcher: the transition from being an adult education practitioner to becoming a full-time researcher; and the process of negotiating and creating meanings with sponsors. I will conclude by raising some questions about writing reflexively.

Background

In 1985, after a number of years as an LEA adult educator, I left a well-paid job as Deputy Head at a high profile Community School to become a full-time contract researcher working with unwaged adults, firstly on a joint LEA/Southampton University Replan project sponsored by NIACE and then on an FEU Replan project focusing on curriculum development issues. The projects ran consecutively over 3-4 years and I worked on both with two part-time colleagues and in collaboration with full-time University and LEA staff. I wrote the final reports for both projects which were subsequently published as: 'Exploring the Educational Needs of Unwaged Adults', NIACE, 1987, and 'Negotiating the Curriculum with Unwaged Adults', FEU, 1989.

A few years later, as part of my PhD, 'Education with Unwaged Adults as Community Adult Education' (1991), I undertook a reflexive methodological critique of the work of the two projects. This was, at one level, a retrospective reflection on my work in the projects and, at another, a commentary on the workings of reflexivity, 'bending back on oneself' within the research.

The former involved re-viewing the whole context and process of the project action *and* the construction of the texts, therefore it was bound to be coloured by my subsequent experience and knowledge of adult education theory and practice as a university adult educator. Thus in conducting my reflexive methodological critique I adopted the concept of 'review' which Usher and Bryant explain as being a process where '..theory is not *applied* to practice; rather, the process can be conceptualized as one where practice is reviewed (re-viewed) through theory.' (1989, 93)

In focusing on the workings of reflexivity within the research, I attempted to surface and problematise pre-understandings, values and research processes not fully acknowledged at the time. Here my starting point was that:

> ...reflexivity requires explicit recognition of the fact that the social researcher, and the social research itself, are part and parcel of the social world under investigation. (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983, 129)

This inevitably involved a focus on personal reflexivity but went beyond this in that it also investigated the theory/practice inter-relationship within the projects and the whole process of negotiating and creating meanings and knowledge.

From practitioner to researcher: reviewing pre-understandings and negotiating meanings with participants

Prior to becoming a contract researcher, I had already come to think of myself as a reflective practitioner, having taken an M.Ed in Adult Education and Community Development and written articles analysing my developing practice as an adult educator. I also had several years experience of developing educational work with unwaged adults where some of my practice was in action-research mode. It was this background that attracted me towards a community-based action-research project with unwaged adults. Equally it shaped my pre-understandings about adult education with unwaged adults and the whole process of action-research.

My new status and situation as a researcher soon required me to question and review these pre-understandings. My previous work experience had been as a benevolent 'gatekeeper' working from different formal educational bases. As a self-identified commu*nity* adult educator, I had always been anxious to distance myself, both ideologically and physically, from my parent institutions. Nevertheless they did provide me with available resources, a clear educational identity and tacit authority for an educational approach and an educational agenda. In my new situation, as a community-based researcher trying to set up a learning resource base in prolonged contact with unwaged adults, I was to find that my authority for conducting an 'educational' approach was no longer so uncontested — it had to be justified and negotiated over time and at length in terms of its relevance to and impact on the total lives of the unwaged adults involved in the project.

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Carr and Kemmis make the following point in relation to action research:

> The problems of education are not simply problems of achieving known ends; they are problems of acting *educationally* in social situations which typically involve competing values and complex interactions between different people who are acting on different understandings of their common situation and on the basis of different values about how the interactions should be conducted. (Carr and Kemmis, 1986, 180)

It was all very well for myself and my educator colleagues to have a shared macro-analysis that educational action alone could not solve the problems of unemployment and that indeed too much concentration on employability and coping ran the risk of becoming involved in 'education for domestication'. However, in developing our research and credibility with unwaged adults, we also had to work out some authentic way of relating our concerns and our educational agenda to their primary concerns: getting a job and surviving both financially and psychologically. It was as a result of this on-going process of negotiation, that, notwithstanding the explicit educational aims of our project brief, we began to take on board the wider agenda of unwaged adults — jobs, welfare rights, information, social and political activities, re-negotiate our aims and purposes and, in addressing their primary concerns, see more clearly how 'education … becomes a methodology rather than a goal.' (Johnston, 1987, 57)

Increasingly central to the progress of our research was the idea and process of accountability to the unwaged adults involved. In trying to develop this, I began to realise that I had to re-view my ideas on the nature and dynamic of the action-research process. Our original research approach was intended to be a cyclical process of action, reflection and then (revised) action, very much in the tradition of Halsey's 'experimental social administration' (Halsey, 1972). A key feature of this approach was the co-ordination, leadership and ultimate control of a Steering Committee representing the different parties with a stake in the project. While the original research proposal had made an explicit commitment '… to involve unemployed and local people as active agents in our research process …', and even although unwaged adults were represented on the Steering Committee, it gradually became clear that if we genuinely wanted to work participatively, we needed to supplement this cyclical, set-piece and representative approach with a participative approach that was more dynamic, democratic and immediately accountable. Therefore we began to operate decision-making on a wider front, working through a variety of Open Meetings and open working groups.

In this way, we began to move towards a more interactive and reflexive *participatory research* strategy and understand more clearly Budd Hall's identification of participatory research being 'at the same time an *approach* of social investigation, an *educational* process, and a means of taking *action*' (Hall, 1981, 455). Gradually, as a result of this new more participatory dimension within the very 'political' area of unemployment, I also began to become more reflexive as a researcher, become much more aware of my values and my situatedness, and so understand better that:

> …'significant' research may put the self at risk … and that certain kinds of research are likely to be more suited to certain kinds of selves as personalities and/or holders of particular values (Usher & Bryant, 1989, 152).

From doing research to writing about it — negotiating and creating textual meanings and outcomes

In examining sponsored research, Morgan identifies a possible conflict between a sponsor's 'production-oriented mentality that emphasizes the importance of achieving significant useful results' and the more tentative and self-doubting understandings of the reflective researcher, so raising questions about the validity and generalizability of the research (Morgan, 1983, 384). This was a resolvable problem in the first, NIACE-sponsored, project, because of the location of the key players within a general liberal adult education tradition and discourse. This allowed sufficient common understanding and flexibility to develop a more participatory approach with greater unwaged involvement and ownership of research processes, meanings and outcomes.

In writing periodic project reports I was aware that my writing did not constitute any 'objective' viewpoint but rather was my own construction of events and my own interpretation of 'a multiplicity of viewpoints.' The final published report succeeded largely in meeting the objectives of the key stakeholders. It was written in a conventional academic style to meet the political agenda of the sponsors and my own personal desire to be recognised as a researcher and an author; it went through a series of drafts, discussions and amendments in consultation with unwaged and other participants so that it reflected a broad consensus of what had taken place and what the major emergent issues were; and it contributed towards the crucial achievement of continuation funding for the project's on-going work.

However, greater difficulties emerged in relation to the outcomes and final report of the second, FEU-sponsored, project. The FEU's research traditions and attitudes were considerably different from the reflective action-research practice favoured by myself and my colleages, and this, in turn, had a very different impact on the negotiation and creation of meanings before, during and at the end of the project. Whereas in the first project the greatest tension had arisen in negotiating meanings with participating unwaged adults, here the major problem of meanings was with the sponsor itself. Potential difficulties were apparent from the initial project brief. The language favoured by the FEU emphasised 'innovation' and 'transferability' and the development of 'skills' as opposed to our previous project's focus on participation and situated outcomes. In keeping with the instrumental research tradition of the FEU, it became increasingly clear that our identified research task was to operationalise aspects of the (given) Conceptual Framework outlined in their recently published and widely-promoted FEU manual, 'Adult Unemployment and the Curriculum' (Watts and Knasel, 1985). Lastly, the only really meaningful outcomes for the FEU were to be generalised and written ones. They were looking for the production of a final report with 'transferable messages', mainly for institutional consumption, rather than any further exploration and reflection on the problems of 'acting educationally' with unwaged adults in specific local circumstances or indeed positive outcomes for the unwaged adults involved. Thus, in this instance, the envisaged text was already shaping the research.

Throughout the project, differences of approach arose between myself and my colleagues as reflective action-researchers and the FEU as sponsors, in the way we began to develop a critique rather than a mere application of the Watts and Knasel Conceptual Framework and in our preference for community-based rather than institutionally-located project action. Indeed, we were reminded at one stage by the FEU that the initial project brief amounted to a 'quasi-legal document'.

Eventually an accommodation was reached on the development of project action. However the major area of contention was always likely to be the text of the final report. Each interim report and review became rehearsals for what could and should be said in the final text. In writing this final report, I was conscious of a tension between my awareness at one level that every act of writing is simultaneously an act of censorship and my understanding at another that:

> We shouldn't forever be trying to match the substance and form of an account to the expectations of a given audience. This runs the risk of simply re-producing and re-inforcing existing perspectives, rather than challenging and changing them. (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983, p. 228)

A text was finally agreed and published, but only after a number of negotiations and compromises. In constructing this, I and my colleagues were continually weighing up what we needed to say to be true to our principles and experience of reflective practice at the same time as what it was possible to say, granted that the FEU had ultimate control of the final report. With this in mind, I decided not to proceed with any likening of the FEU's research approach to Glaser and Strauss's idea of 'theoretical capitalism', (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), while standing firm on the language of critical and reflexive practice rather than mere curriculum application.

A final commentary on this whole process of negotiating and creating textual meanings is best left to the foreword to the Final Report written by our supervising FEU Field Officer:

> This project ... was originally intended to explore the implementation of the contrasting elements of the Watts and Knasel curriculum — 'Leisure' and 'Opportunity Creation'. A subtext of this examination might have been to examine the fitness of different types of institution (e.g. adult education and further education) to deliver the different elements of the curriculum. During its life, however, the project developed these original aims and also built on a previous NIACE/REPLAN project to produce what was in effect a critique of the Watts and Knasel framework, as well as creating identifying and monitoring good practice in curriculum development with unemployed adults. In this development, issues connected with institutional types, though considered, became a secondary issue. (FEU, 1989)

Writing reflexively: a postscript

My recent experience of trying to write reflexively has helped me to be more confident and self-critical in acknowledging that:

> the notion of reflexivity recognises that texts do not simply and transparently report an independent order of reality. Rather, the texts themselves are implicated in the work of reality-construction. (Atkinson, 1990, 7)

It has also made me more aware of some of the potential problems in writing reflexively:

- the dangers of becoming stuck at the level of introspective and 'confessional' individual reflexivity, without moving on to engage with the wider research process of negotiating and creating meanings and knowledge;
- the problems of attempting to speak for others, notwithstanding one's emancipatory intent.

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Collecting data and recollecting in tranquillity: reflections on a research project

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I am conscious that in this paper I am straying into waters well-charted to colleagues in SCUTREA but unfamiliar to me. This weak little nautical metaphor comes very easily, since my usual research and writing are devoted to nautical imagery in English literature, particularly of the eighteenth century. A typical example of my writing which comes to mind has the title *Images of the sea in English Literature 1660–1815* and was published, as it happens, by the French Navy.

As a tutor of literature my interests are inevitably much wider and more mainstream, and indeed this very particular research field has figured very small in a good many years' teaching. Like many tutors in the liberal tradition I have built up a personal library of beliefs and perhaps something of a pantheon of deities constructed from my continual receiving of feedback from students and personal responses to my own teaching.

In 1981 I set up a course which for its time was a considerable innovation. It was from the outset called Return to Study English and was designed as a joint venture with the Southampton University English Department for adults who wanted to follow an intensive course, perhaps with a view to mature admission to a degree programme. The course was successful from the start, and in 1990-91, its tenth anniversary year, at a time when it seemed appropriate to review its progress and assess the outcomes for the 200 or so students who had followed it, I was asked to write a chapter about the course for a book on adult students and literature. This review was the project on which this paper reflects.

I was accustomed to trying to assess the success or failure of courses by the informal ways familiar to any sensitive tutor of adults, and by the occasional semi-formal use of evaluation questions at the end of a course. But for this exercise in reviewing a course I took the conscious decision to adopt a much more schematic and, as I believed, orthodox, research method — a questionnaire survey of all students who had enrolled on this course. I chose this approach partly because the course had much more clearly-defined objectives than many liberal adult education courses, and it seemed therefore that it would be possible to ask unambiguous questions about the achievement or not of these objectives for any student. It was also the case that questions about the course were frequently seeking statistical data — what proportion of students did go on to higher education? What kind of degrees did they get? Was English always the subject they studied? Did the course help students with career prospects? I had my usual tutor's instincts about the course, and a sense of the rough answer to these questions, but nothing more quantifiable.

A questionnaire-based survey was unfamiliar territory to an eighteenth-century poetry specialist, but I had seen quite a lot of questionnaires in my time and constructed mine with the advice of colleagues with social science backgrounds. The questionnaire was of a very standard type, with boxes to tick, varying routes through it according to whether, for example, the respondent had completed the course, and a final open-ended general request for comments. Having tested it on a pilot group of my students I conducted the survey, analysed the returns and wrote up the findings for publication.

The results were satisfactory, and in terms of what was revealed about the course, reassuring. A much higher proportion of students was successful in admission to higher education than I would have guessed, for example. I had my hard data, my answers to the questions from admissions tutors, prospective employers, radio interviewers, graduate students from other universities conducting their own investigations into mature learning and access. I had satisfied my own determination to give my chapter a solid foundation of factual data on which to base my review.

So my first reflection was a rather complacent one. I had produced a set of findings based on quantifiable data, not on hunches or anecdote or the true but partial account of those students with whom I happened to still be in contact. I had also achieved what seemed to me, as an arts-based research scholar, an enviable degree of objectivity.

But other reflections are less comfortable. I was surprised on the occasions of presenting these findings at seminars and conferences at the questioning reaction of my audience, who tended to be more experienced in mainstream adult education research. Questions probed my own choice of method — my quest for 'hard data', and then on my reliance on these data.

They may be hard, but where was the test of reliability, and relevance? What I found disquieting (and ironic, given my own background), was that there was greater interest in the responses to the open-ended general final questions than in the specificity of my ticked boxes.

These reactions were on the one hand galling, given the time and effort I had spent schooling myself into my own image of an educational researcher with a foundation discipline of social science, and on the other reassuring in that I was being invited to replace this assumed persona with something much more like my 'real' self as both analyst of the most subjective of all text — poetry — and teacher within the mainstream liberal adult education tradition.

And anyway, my own reaction to my hard data had its complexities. The response-rate of the questionnaires was good — certainly adequate. But the response rate from students who had dropped out of the course without explanation was much lower, and left me to rely on my subjective resources to incorporate a degree of weighting into my findings. More general was the evident phenomenon of students constructing their own texts out of their reading of my questions (something I was of course perfectly aware of, and habitually alerted my students to, in their reading of poetical texts!). This, added to the equally inevitable construction of the responses, both individually and collectively, into a discourse of my own, produced the kind of textual matrix which I entirely expect in a poem, or in a student's essay, but to which my adopted 'scientific' methodology had desensitised me. I had willed myself into the behavioural tendency of the adult student who will trust the 'scientific' rather than the personal[1] except that I had not the student's excuse of lack of confidence.

This error did not, and does not, damage my belief in the findings of my project, but it did drive me away from my assumed scientism and back into the arena of my educational practice before I was able to turn my data into a recognisable reflection of ten years' experience of this course. In other words it propelled me into the now familiar role of reflection as practitioner and recognition of the inevitable presence of one's self in any educational research activity.

I would like to claim that this mismatch between research and everyday educational professional practice arises from the dilemma of the academic subject specialist finding himself or herself in an educational unit of assessment for research purposes, and therefore scrabbling for a foothold in a new research area. And to some extent such a claim is justifiable.

But it would be easy to protest too much here. In the same way as my professional experience had perfectly well equipped me to handle my students' questionnaire responses once I had overcome my flirtation with positivist 'scientism', so the same experience had engendered the kind of reflection and adaptation/ innovation in theory and practice which I subsequently found in the writings of SCUTREA members and their international colleagues.

Like any other experienced teacher of adults I have long been accustomed to adapting practice through experience and reflection. Of course, as recognised in the literature on this, the point at which such reflection and adaptation emerge into consciousness and consequent conscious action will vary, but again there is a close analogy here with the point at which the creation of a writer's imagination emerges into conscious 'literary' text.

Indeed it seems to me there is a most interesting correlation between current thinking on practice and theory/research and the thinking of a writer far more familiar to myself — the poet Coleridge. Perhaps more than any other literary figure Coleridge possessed a balance of a fine creative imagination and a mind given to analysis of the creative process. His much younger contemporary Keats characterised Coleridge famously as someone who would

> let go by a fine isolated verisimilitude caught from the penetralium of mystery by being incapable of remaining content with half knowledge.[2]

Coleridge was perhaps the first of the reflective practitioners (as opposed to philosopher) in his analysis of the workings of the poetical imagination, an analysis promoted by his response to the poems of his then close friend Wordsworth, and to the creative collaboration which existed between them and produced the Lyrical Ballads of 1798.

Coleridge would have recognised the role of 'the self in the research arena'[3]. His starting point for dismissing Hartley's law of association as the mechanistic explanation of literary creativity (and indeed of all mental activity) was his awareness of the mind as a combination of the subjective and the objective which produced 'the mind's self experience in the act of thinking'[4]. This led him to his definition of the imagination as the presiding faculty of human perception and creativity (not just that of poets), a faculty which had the unique capacity for continuously recreating the self through the constant accumulation of experience:

> The Imagination ... I hold to be the living power and prime agent of all human perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM ... It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates in order to re-create... it struggles to idealise and unify. it is essentially vital, even as all objects are essentially fixed and dead.[5]

Attempts to define literature are notoriously difficult, but in any such attempt the word 'experience' will be not far away. The practice of the poet is to a large extent the definition of experience, and for the imagination to work on, and define, such experience requires, according to Coleridge and Wordsworth, reflection, or, in their words 'recollection in tranquillity.' It is then that everyday experiences such as the sight of a field of daffodils can become assimilated into the perceiving self as they 'flash upon that inward eye.'[6]

The poet as practitioner then, having assimilated experience, and reflected on the working of the imagination, can incorporate such refined experience into his or her developing self as creator. For Coleridge perhaps his greatest example of the creative imagination was 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' — in which his central character reflects on causality and expiation in a poem which is itself an extended metaphorical voyage into the imagination itself.

Which, curiously for a subject specialist caught outside his 'proper' discipline, is a point I made in the paper entitled *Images of the Sea In English Literature 1660–1815*, published by the French Navy [7].

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Doing adult education research through autobiography

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MY aim in this paper is to develop some ideas about the relationship between research and autobiography, to sketch some of the changes in my own orientation to and understanding of the research process, and to summarise what I think I have learned through my own autobiographical explorations. I believe that researchers concerned with understanding the processes of adult learning need to be centrally concerned with their own learning, and hence need to acknowledge the autobiographical dimensions of their research.

My life in research: untangling personal and professional strands

My career as a researcher began in the mid-1970s when I registered as a Ph.D. student in the University of Leicester and embarked upon research into the coverage of educational issues in the British mass media. I spent over two years conducting content analysis of newspaper stories and television news broadcasts and interviewing journalists who reported on education. I was at the 'just writing-up' stage of my research when I was offered a post as a lecturer in Department of Adult and Higher Education in the University of Manchester. I became so absorbed in the teaching in my new post that my research interests lapsed. My content analysis sheets and interview notes gathered dust and I developed a wide repertoire of excuses not to return to my research and writing up.

It was not until nearly ten years later that I made serious efforts to complete my thesis, and by then I had shifted my focus from media treatment of education to an evaluation of my own practice as an adult educator and a group relations trainer. (The full version of this story appears in Miller, 1992, which was completed as a thesis in 1989.) By the time I propelled myself into the writing up, my research interests and orientation had changed, and I had considerable doubts about the validity of my original project. I felt that to continue or repeat a research process when I was so uncertain about its value would be at best an empty ritual and at worst a fraudulent exercise.

The initial urge to move from my original research focus came out of my unease with the theoretical and methodological bases of the 1970s project, but I came to realise that there were other reasons for my reluctance to return to this work. In the Preamble to my thesis, I recorded how

> I stumbled into ... [an important] piece of self-insight as I sifted gloomily though my dusty file of content analysis data some time in 1983 ... I was conscious at times of an extremely negative emotional reaction to the sight of my coding schedule or the dog-eared notes from interviews conducted around the pubs of Fleet Street or Farringdon Road, and I generally interpreted these reactions as stemming from my self-disgust at having dragged around the baggage of this project for so long.
>
> However, returning to the material after a long interval, I recognised that my frequent desire to jettison the files of newspaper cuttings had been prompted by a mixture of confused and painful feelings. These were associated with the period of my life spent as a research student, during which I left my husband, in the midst of a tangle of emotional and domestic turmoil. When I read through my coding schedule, for example, I could remember the circumstances under which I added a particular category; sometimes I could recollect the day of the addition, and the demoralising argument which had occurred the day I came across a particular cutting. Notes from an interview would evoke the memory of the fact that I had packed my bags to leave the marital home for the third time on the day before I talked to the man from that particular national daily. It was easier, in the relative calm of 1983, to look back and react in an intellectual rather than emotional frame, but the events stamped into the fabric of my interview notes and coding sheets had for several years given me nightmares, quite literally. (Miller, 1992, pp. 10–11).

I think that it was this sudden realisation of the impossibility of separating personal (marital) and professional (research) concerns and the recognition of the complex interplay between the primarily intellectual activity of doing research and the inner emotional life of the researcher which brought me to my present belief that all social research constitutes an autobiography of the researcher.

Of course, researchers vary considerably in the extent to which they make their personal story explicit; often the only clues are to be found in acknowledgements, prefaces and methodological appendices. My thesis took the form of an explicit sociological autobiography. For example, in the chapter which approximated to a review of relevant literature, I attempted to chart the influences on my thinking in the fields of education and communication studies and to link interpersonal relatonships with academic influences. I have observed that even in texts which purport to give the 'real story' of a research project (see, for example, the papers in Burgess, 1984), there is still a tendency to cite relevant literature in a way that signals detachment and distance. In my experience, most academics read (and, hence, cite) authors and texts not merely on the basis of library searches and explorations in publishers' catalogues, but through personal and professional relationships with colleagues in their field. When I read the work of people I know, it is clear to me that much of the literature which they cite is written by their friends, colleagues, students, spouses, lovers, ex-partners and so on. To the insider's eye, many a list of references provides a concise case study in invisible colleges (see Crane, 1972). Rarely do the lists of names and dates arranged in their neutralising brackets give this away to those not already a part of the network in question, although there are writers who have turned the dedication of a text into an artform. Two examples of which I am particularly fond are Laud Humphreys's dedication of the book which recounts his sociological study of casual sexual encounters in public lavatories to his wife and children 'whose encouragement and love made this research possible' (Humphreys, 1970, p. v), and Reg Revans's dedication of his text on action learning to his wife 'in hope of forgiveness' (Revans, 1982, p. iii).

Action research: retangling myself as research subject and object

The action research projects which I conducted during the 1980s and which I described and analysed in my thesis involved me as both subject and object of the research process. Most of these projects, involving experimentation with techniques based on the T-group laboratory, were far removed from the focus of my 1970s work, in which I used a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods of content analysis and conducted an occupational study of journalists from the position of an 'outsider'. The data on which I drew for my analysis of the later work were made up for the most part of volumes of personal diaries, workshop plans and brainstormed lists generated on many sheets of flip-chart paper.

One aspect of my recent research which provides some continuity with my earlier excursions into the analysis of mass communications is that involving practical exercises in media sociology, where, at least for short periods of time, I have become a newspaper editor. A number of participants at this conference will probably have seen *Scoop*, SCUTREA's newsletter, of which, with David Jones, I am founding co-editor. Fewer colleagues will have come across an earlier, scruffier and more scurrilous tabloid, to which *Scoop* perhaps owes its existence and certainly some of its style, namely, the *Bongo Times*. This paper came about in the course of some work in which I was engaged with Jim Brown during the mid-'80s, in which we experimented with the design of experiential learning events, conceptualising conferences as microcosmic societies. At the same time, we were attempting to understand and to influence the politics and dynamics of the Group Relations Training Association, a professional organisation of educators and trainers which pioneered the use of T-group laboratory methods in Britain, and in which Jim and I were heavily involved. During the 1985 GRTA Conference, we set ourselves up as capitalist entrepreneurs of the leisure industries within the micro-economy of the conference. We hired a marquee in order to operate a nightclub for insomniac conference participants, and, as it now seems, in order to ensure that we spent the entire conference in a sleepless state, we established ourselves as proprietors and editors of the conference newpaper, the *Bongo Times*. For the first day of the conference, we went so far as to produce the *Bongo Times*'s 'rival' paper, *The Daily Rupert*, as well.

Immediately after this experience I remarked that I had learned more about journalists' ideologies and practices in the three days of the conference than in nearly a decade of reading sociological studies of journalism. However, while I would not wish to diminish the importance of the experiential learning acquired through my entering the roles of editor and news-gatherer, I recognise that I would have performed these roles rather differently had I not had a detailed knowledge of journalism as a researcher and consumer of journalistic products. Indeed, if I had not been socialised into media research, or had not been a sociologist, I should probably not have conceived of the *Bongo Times* at all.

The contrast to which I wish to draw attention here is that between research about an occupational group conducted from the outside, with the group in question clearly conceived of as 'other' to the researcher, and research which involves the researcher as an insider, or a member of the community being researched (and, indeed, where the research is formulated with the intention of promoting change, and where the politics of the researcher are made explicit). My research orientation remains broadly in accord with the position exemplified in the *Bongo Times* project, although these days I find I have slightly less stamina than I did in 1985 when it comes to action research which involves staying up all night.

Reading my autobiography: reviewing relations with other selves

In working through my life history, I have tried to understand the influences on my own learning as an adult, and, in particular, the way in which my personal and professional development has been shaped as a result of my membership of a variety of reference groups and invisible colleges.

I see reference groups as being those which provide for me 'a frame of reference for self-evaluation and attitude formation' (Merton, 1957, p. 283). It is important to stress that a reference group is not necessarily one of which I am a member; sometimes groups which help me to define what I am not or what I do not want to be are as significant as those to which I belong, or to membership of which I aspire. Reference groups to which I belong include those made up of adult educators, sociologists, feminists, working-class kids made good, T-group trainers, — and, in more recent times, gatekeepers and managers. Groups to which I do not belong, but which have had a significant impact on me in terms of helping me to establish my identity through an understanding of what I am not — what constitutes 'other' — include those made up of psychologists, quantitative researchers and Rogerian counsellors.

The term 'invisible college' is used to define a phenomenon in academic communities described by Derek de Solla Price in the following way:

> For each group there exists a sort of commuting circuit of institutions, research centers and summer schools giving them an opportunity to meet piecemeal, so that over an interval of a few years everybody who is anybody has worked with everyone else in the same category. Such groups constitute an invisible college. (de Solla Price, 1965, p.85).

The colleagues I have met and worked with in SCUTREA constitute a significant part of one such group. The boundaries of SCUTREA do not equate precisely with the boundaries of the invisible college to which I belong in the field of adult education, since significant others in the group include non-members of SCUTREA — for example, there are a number of North Americans in my group.

By describing and analysing my own patterns of operation within such groups, and by employing a model of experiential learning (in which reflection on experience leads to the development of theory and the formulation of future action, which in turn becomes the object of further reflection and theory-building), I have begun to advance my understanding of these groups in a broader sense, and my insights have become the basis for further explorations and other research projects. There is, therefore, interplay between the way in which I research myself and that in which I research other selves.

One piece of research in which I am currently engaged is concerned with the facilitation of learning. I am investigating what some of those generally agreed to be expert facilitators see as important elements of their practice. This work has grown out of my reflections on my own experience of facilitation and my attempts to identify key features of my own practice. Another current project focuses on the nature and extent of invisible colleges within the international community of adult educators: the interconnections between scholars and researchers, the common points in their biographies, the networks and groups to which they belong, how they decide what to read and to whom they talk, the conferences they attend and how they see the professional world they inhabit. It is clear that the way I have constructed the research on invisible colleges has come out of reflection on my membership of (and construction of) reference groups. And my discoveries about how others construct their social and professional worlds in turn shape the way in which I conceptualise my own.

Writing my autobiography: actively constructing myself

Re-reading the autobiographical account of my research from 1989, I am struck by something of which I was much less aware at the time, namely the artful nature of the construction in which I was engaged. It seems to me that, at the same time as I was giving a critical perspective on others' texts and interpretations, I tended to privilege my own accounts such as those contained in my diaries. I think that embedded into my 1989 text was an assumption about the possibility of discovering truths about the past (and about myself) through the analysis of contemporary documents and through a revisiting of past experience.

I am now more inclined to see the process of autobiographical writing as an active construction of myself for a particular audience and purpose. I construct myself through writing [about] myself, as, indeed, I do through my everyday conversations. Much of my social life involves meeting with friends and exchanging accounts and analyses of recent history. I tell stories of what has recently happened to me; often the narratives are tried out with one friend and then honed or edited with another. I am sometimes conscious of working on the characterisation, pace and punchline of a particular narrative. Over time the issue becomes not so much whether the story is 'true' or 'exaggerated', but rather whether its timing is appropriate and whether its elements are arranged in such a way to maximise drama or ironic effect or to provide a climax or whatever it is I am trying to achieve with or from my audience. In writing the process is more clearly open to scrutiny. I type one version of the story of an event and then read and re-read and tinker with the words, consult the thesaurus, insert synonyms, change the order of phrases to enhance the rhythm and flow of sentences, cut, paste, and chop out unnecessary sections. What ends up in the final version, I realise, is more to do with what fits my criteria of what works on the page than with what might be more or less 'true'.

Liz Stanley is a feminist sociologist who has written extensively on life-writing (see Stanley, 1992; 1993; Stanley and Morgan, 1993), using the term auto/biography to indicate the close relationship she sees between writing accounts of one's own life and writing accounts of the lives of others. She suggests that recent sociological concern with biography and autobiography may be seen as arising from two diverse sources: firstly, from Robert Merton's sociology of knowledge (see, for example, Merton, 1972; 1988), and secondly, from concerns with reflexivity in feminist research and feminist praxis. Feminist research, to be consistent with feminist politics and principles, demands that researchers write themselves into their accounts of the research process.

My own autobiographical explorations have been influenced by my reading of Merton's account of sociological autobiography as 'a personal exercise ... in the sociology of scientific knowledge' (Merton, 1988, p. 19), by my reading of feminist research and epistemology, by my experience as a feminist and by my contact with other feminist sociologists such as Liz Stanley herself. (I should also acknowledge, in the spirit of making personal influence explicit, my knowledge of Liz's work comes as much from conversation as from reading her academic texts, since she is a close friend.)

I suspect that the process of constructing and reading sociological and feminist autobiography is an ongoing process of conducting a dialogue with different 'selves' over time. One version of a text becomes the data for the next version: intertextuality indeed. The 'voice' of one version of an autobiography becomes the initiator of a conversation with one's self from another point in history.

In writing about the past, I actively construct the past for myself as well as for others. Earlier in this paper, I quoted an extract from an account I wrote in (I think) 1987, and edited in 1989, of events which took place in 1983. I chose here to quote that account because my recollection of the events to which I refer has been shaped by that account of the 1983 experience written in 1987, completed and edited in 1989 and published in 1992. I have a vivid mental picture of the desk at which I wrote the account quoted above, and the room in which I completed the editing of that account a couple of years later, but a much hazier recollection of the events themselves.

Conclusions

I think that adult educators benefit greatly from the periods of sustained reflection on personal and professional experience which autobiographical analysis and writing require. Certainly I believe my own practice to have been enhanced and enriched as a result of this activity.

However, some of my colleagues have expressed severe doubts about the value of autobiographical research, dismissing this type of work as 'subjective', 'unscientific', 'unreliable' or 'unrepresentative'. One colleague who participated in a seminar which I presented a few months ago on the theme of autobiography as research (and research as autobiography) said he thought that many of his mature students would greatly enjoy being given the opportunity to write autobiography, and enquired what advice I would offer such students. When I said that my advice would be to 'go for it', he asked, 'But what for? As a form of therapy?' In my view, writing about one's own life has benefits far beyond the personally therapeutic. Paul Armstrong's account of the theory and practice of what he calls the 'life history method' in educational research (Armstrong, 1987) provides a forceful argument for the advantages to be derived from this method and shows that it can be seen as a particularly appropriate approach for adult education researchers to adopt, in that it facilitates the development of praxis and the operation of participatory research paradigms in this field.

The current interest in autobiography amongst social scientists and adult educators (evident in many of the papers in this volume) may be seen as far from an ephemeral enthusiasm amongst researchers. The focus on the researcher's personal experience can be seen as a return to long-standing concerns in sociology with self-reflexivity and to established definitions of social scientific activity; C. Wright Mills, for example, argues that 'as a social scientist, you have to ... capture what you experience and sort it out' (Mills, 1970, p. 216), and asserts that 'the sociological imagination enables us to grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society'(ibid., p. 12). Autobiographical research and writing, in enabling researchers to link the personal and the structural, individual life-histories and collective social movements, and private and public worlds, can be seen as central and fundamental to the social scientific enterprise.

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Changing places: issues for the practitioner turned researcher

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SINCE 1978 I have been involved in the world of creative writing as a student, a critic, a writer, an adult-education organiser and as a tutor. When I was appointed last year to work on an HEFC-funded research project, *Evaluating Creative Writing in Adult Education in Cleveland*, I felt confident that this experience would 'naturally' inform and shape the research. Such experience, I assumed, qualified me to look at creative writing activity in the county and would lend authority to my observations and conclusions.

I should have known that there's rarely anything natural about natural and in this session I want to facilitate a discussion with others of some of the issues which arise when a practitioner turns researcher. In the session we'll work together on some questions and a case study, but first I want to give you some background about who I am and what my preoccupations are.

'We haven't really got you at all,' said my project director rather ruefully in the early days of the work as we attempted to disentangle development issues from research issues. This is the heart of it. Had I moved to the area for any other reason, including taking up an organising or teaching post at the centre, I could have been instrumental and interventionist in Cleveland's writing culture and, knowing me, I would have been. I've lots of experience, some of it not well represented in the area, and a lot of enthusiasm, but as a researcher instrumentality and intervention are problematic.

A potentially attractive solution is simply to ignore or blur the distinction between research and development. Put down the pencil, switch off the tape recorder: participate. Get my hands dirty. Deal with the conflict by ignoring it. Work with a developmental bias. Call it action research. Get away with it. But I didn't want to.

I wanted the chance after years of immersion in doing, to stand back and reflect on the range of processes and outcomes involved in that doing. I wanted to ask myself — and others — where we were getting it right and where we were getting it wrong. I wanted to stay with the awkward questions that I hadn't the time or sometimes the courage to confront. I was prepared to be surprised and changed by what I found out because the flux of everyday life makes it hard — and sometimes impossible — to see the patterns, structures and implications of what it is that you are part of. Outsiders do see things that insiders don't, and that can sometimes be a problem and sometimes not.

The privilege of seeing so many classes at work, of talking with such a range of tutors and students about their motives for doing creative writing and the different ways in which they approach and value it, genuinely is a privilege. The ways that I teach and argue for my subject will never be the same again. I feel an obligation to make available the research findings in such a way that as many people as possible can experience the challenge to, and consolidation of, their ways of working that exposure to such diversity and debate entails.

But before that wonderful moment arrives, I have to do the research and that means setting aside my tutorly, writerly self and becoming the researcher. Who am I when I do that ? Who, and what, do people think I am when I do that ? What positive and negative aspects does the tension of this movement bring to my research practice ?

I have a hunch that other research workers have similar experiences. I want to know where it is and isn't the same for you. I want to know the consequences for our research of leaving these questions unresolved, and for our teaching if and when we return to it. I hope the workshop will act as a model of research practice itself by offering a critical and sympathetic space in which to explore the nature of who we are, what we do and how well we do it.

Research, in the sense of wanting to find things out and then use them to extend my own and other people's thinking and practice, has been a fairly constant element in my life since the mid 1970s. However, it is only in the last few years that I have become a professional researcher, with a full-time paid job and identity. Although it is this change which most concerns me, I do not want to suggest that only researchers can do research, indeed I find that tendency worrying. The conflicts I'm outlining are present in an even more acute form for researchers who are still and simultaneously practitioners. It is different though. Previously my work, and my identity with work, was located in a network of regular, structured contact with students and tutors; in informal contact with friends and colleagues doing similar work and in the political hurly burly of fighting a corner either within an institution or as part of that institution against the local or central state. In that work I had the kind of running (and often on the run) commentary on my practice that all part-time tutors have. It was often closely tied to a particular incident or person, whether tutor or student, and usually needed a quick resolution or closure. I also knew who people thought I was and on what basis they were making their judgments. I was, on the whole, well thought of, respected and validated in what I was doing by the people I did it with and for.

Research changed all that. Sometimes I feel like a duckling who has been patterned on sheepdogs. There I am, bounding up to people, wagging my tail at the prospect of meeting, talking, learning, changing together and suddenly they draw back their teeth and I realise that nobody has taught me how to fly and that I am, after all, an awkward ungainly creature who does not really speak their language. I like that image. It captures all the pathos of failing to connect and be appreciated that is too often a feature of my working life these days. And it echoes the fairy story of the ugly duckling who one day becomes a swan and soars, beautiful, above the world that mocked her. And isn't successful research sometimes like that ?

That's an image of myself as researcher that feels right to me, but I know that the people in Cleveland whose work and leisure it has become my job to observe, comment on and discuss have different images of me. I'm the little spy, a shark, a wolf, a fat cat. Predatory, menacing, threatening. I'm the school mistress, the hanging judge, the bureaucrat. I'm a waste of precious time. And although I silently express outrage at this travesty of myself, the tutorly, writerly me realises that of course they will think this, and believe it to be true. I've done it myself.

When I worked at Centerprise, an innovative community centre in East London, researchers of all kinds were a constant and often frustrating fact of life. It helps me now to consider how we perceived them then, to see what makes the difference between a meaningful or meaningless research encounter as the researched experience it.

Three factors are involved. The first is loosely covered by professionalism and it refers to things like: clear communications, legible correspondence, punctuality and so on. We had to feel that the researcher respected the constraints under which we worked and understood that we could not prioritise the research project to the same extent that she/he did.

Secondly, we had to understand the purpose of the research. We had to know why it was being done, what its broad political or ideological framework was and why the researcher was interested. This area is pivotal. At Centerprise our reactions to researchers' reasons for doing research varied. Infuriated, when people described, yet again, this unique round thing they were going to call The Wheel. Appreciative, when people spent time we couldn't justify explaining in detail what a valuable and important place we were. Wary, when people made a bee line for our grubby compromises and tarnished idealisms.

At Centerprise and elsewhere in adult education when I've been subjected — and I use the word deliberately — to research, it has sometimes seemed a waste of time, simply dealing with the self-evident in superficial and banal ways. At other times it has taken the opposite course, all very well in theory but you try working here and putting that into practice ... It's all about sorting out the common purposes from the crossed purposes and I am struck by how powerfully the meshing of those two things define my situation here in Cleveland. If we assume common purpose, we're more likely to get crossed wires. We have to build our common purposes, and build them fully aware that there will be conflicts and disagreements. Nobody outside of the full-time staff of the university had a stake in this research project before it began. The majority of people engaging in creative writing activity in Cleveland didn't formulate the research project, they didn't own it then and they don't now and most of them would probably prefer to see the money spent on something else.

The third factor that can make participating in research a positive or negative experience is the consequences of the research. At Centerprise I learnt some important things about this: first the researcher is oddly powerful and powerless. Second, research has several distinct kinds and sites of effect, immediate and cumulative, on the researcher, on those engaging in the research process and those engaged by the research findings. One of the hardest tasks we have as researchers is conveying this accurately to those we are doing research with, for and about. I want our discussion to tease out and explore the complexities of this relation to power, information and change.

Researchers cannot guarantee outcomes although this is often the first thing people ask about. I find it hard to answer questions like: What are you going to do with this? What will happen as a result of it? Emphasise your lack of power and people don't see the point of giving up their valuable time to you; fail to emphasise it sufficiently and people either think you will solve all their problems or that you will close their classes and undermine their ways of working. Tell them it's all in the process and ... don't be surprised if they hit you.

I am intrigued — and frightened — and dismayed — by the perceptions people project on to me. I may well be ruthless, unfeeling and intimidating, but it does seem to me that at least some of the explanation for this negative response to research lies in the low esteem and low status (not) enjoyed by part-time tutors in our profession.

Research and researchers will have to work very hard indeed to turn around a situation where the people who are the bedrock of our work feel diminished either because they fear that their practice will be found wanting in some way or they resent that it is not perceived as valuable until an outsider comes along and says so.

'Speaking personally': the 'self' in educational oral history work

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Self-definition through educational experiences

WHILE interviewing a woman in her sixties who was labelled during her school career as being 'mentally handicapped' *(sic)* she told me she wrote the letters for the women she lived with who could not read and write. Rather than seeing this as a supportive action, she asked, "You don't think I'm forward do you? People have said that, teachers and staff have said that."

I was shocked that a society could remove so much of a person's self esteem that they saw actions which are helpful to others, as a sign of being arrogant. I tried to reassure her that I felt she had been kind and thoughtful. This incident highlights many of the issues which I hope to focus on in this paper.

Feminist theory has emphasized the social process which keeps women within the 'private domain', where they are expected to be passive and not put themselves forward. Challenging this process is seen as a threat to their femininity. This gendering of women is further overlaid in the labelling of women with learning difficulties.

Education both formal and informal is central to this socialization process. Traditional education research has focused on quantitative methods and has not recognised the importance of the 'self conception' in educational experience. More recently researchers have begun to examine qualitative methods, such as personal interview and life history material. My initial thoughts on my research were concerned to explore how these factors of gender, learning difficulty, education and self interrelated and converged. Life history interviews seemed a good approach.

The personal in research

As revealed in the story at the beginning of this paper, I found that it was impossible to exclude myself and my opinions when I was interviewing. Ann Oakley's work from the early 1980s is still an excellent reference point for the relationship between researcher and researched in interviews. She states:

> It becomes clear that, in most cases, the goal of finding out about people through interviewing is best achieved when ... the interviewer is prepared to invest his or her own personal identity in the relationship[1].

This feminist perspective has been developed in the area of autobiography, particularly in Liz Stanley's work, *The Auto/Biographical I*[2]. This work posits a 'self' or 'identity' as a major contributing factor in both the development of the research question and the research itself. Stanley identifies a self that is social in every respect, constructed in terms of gender, class, race, age, etc. This self is a composite of attitudes and feelings which effects our research process. This is an essential realisation in reflecting on research. Stanley is exploring the complexity of notions of the self and it is this aspect of reflexive feminist sociology on which I wish to build.

Most conceptions of the self still spring from a developmental psychology which may argue over the stages and ages of development but which ultimately suggest a fixed personality. Within sociology we have been more concerned with the external forces which determine our personality; but the personality is still at some point a fixed construct.

I have been interested in the conception of the self as developed initially by George Herbert Mead, a social psychologist in the 1930s[3]. Mead's 'self' is constructed in relation to a 'generalized other' — in other words, a society. The 'self' symbolises meaning or comes to 'know' itself, through interaction.

What I take as important from this perspective is an inherent notion that interaction is an on-going process. There is no age or stage at which it ends. It is social, in that it is through interaction with the 'Others', that we come to understand ourselves. These 'Others' can be either individuals who are imbued with social roles and identities, gender, class, race, etc, or institutions which reproduce these 'identities', such as 'the family' or 'the education system'. It is also personal in that it is our own individual expression of that social mix. This process of identity definition is constantly being developed.

There are of course specific moments which particularly shape our 'self', but in the on-going process of interaction many 'selves' may emerge. There are many life histories in each of us. If we accept this perspective it has implications for any analysis of the life history interview. The 'story' or 'self' as revealed in the life history interview is developed in an interactive moment. It is a moment of 'creation' rather than the recounting of a fixed past or self. The interactive process, within the interview, structures a new definition of self for both people involved in that moment.

Researching the self in educational terms

I would like to highlight these issues in a discussion about my relationship with one woman I interviewed in the summer of 1992. I had become aware in previous discussions that education had a major effect on the lives of the women I was interviewing. This operated both in practical terms, with most of them being referred as 'mentally sub-normal' by their teachers and educational psychologists, and in personal terms through their self-definition being centred around issues of intelligence. The women would comment, 'It's because I'm stupid' or 'They said I was stupid but they're wrong, I can read'. I began to include questions about educational experience specifically in the interviews.

Martha and Mary

Martha Lewis[4], an intelligent women in her sixties, had lived in a convent home since turning 18. She had moved out in 1991. She referred to her entry into the convent as 'a life sentence.' I enjoyed spending time with Martha. She was interested in her family history and had traced it back to 1740. It seemed to me that her desire to 'know' her family's past was a way of affirming her present as well as a concern for history. I asked her what she thought of this suggestion.

> "Well I suppose, ... I do get pleasure knowing I'm descended from a wealthy Bishop. It makes me feel less like a nobody, if you know what I mean."

Her determination to understand her past had pushed her to develop the limited reading and writing skills she had acquired at school.

> "No-one bothered much with me at school. They didn't in special school, sort of thought you couldn't make it, so they didn't try. But I worked on it. Everyone put me down, said I was too bold, they didn't see any need for education. Then the sisters tried me out to live in the world ... my mother blew her top and told them they were never, never to let me out."

This comment immediately developed a rush of conflicting emotions in me. I remembered my own experience of being left by my mother at a convent. This was a part of my life history which I had not included in the 'telling' for many years. It was not so much that I had forgotten it, it had not seemed relevant to myself. However I became aware that my choice of this research project was connected to this aspect of my life. I had been left at a convent boarding school at the age of four. I had lived there till I was 10, visiting my separated parents during school holidays. I never settled and constantly wished I could live with my mother. I had embarked on this research project, investigating the lives of women with learning difficulties living in a convent, but had not recognised the connections between my own experience and the women I wanted to understand. The interview had 're-made' my history. It led me to question whose life history I was really researching.

Two years ago Martha was encouraged by a social worker to take up the Open University's course 'Patterns for Living'[5]. This course examined the choices in lifestyle open to people with learning difficulties. Martha enjoyed the course and it had a major effect on her life. She had chosen to move out of the convent home. Her social worker's perception of the course was that it had been a complete success. Although pleased that it had helped her situation, Martha felt that she had never really benefited. The social worker had her agenda, to help Martha make a difficult decision, but Martha's agenda was also to get recognition for learning.

> "They never let me do the assignments and send them in. That wasn't important to them. I never got the chance to do the exam. Having done the work, they should have let me try. It's a bit like school all over again."

I found myself becoming involved. I helped Martha get registered for the course and I am currently helping her with the assignments. She is doing well and she is more confident. I conducted my final official interview with Martha in January of this year. We spent the time discussing how she saw my involvement in her life.

> "When I first met you, I wondered what you wanted to know. I hadn't met a researcher before, but I'd heard about you lot, you academics, from the Open University and I wanted to carry my course on, so I was happy to meet you 'cause I saw it as a way I could carry that on, 'cause I thought, she'll be interested in me, being a university student herself, and that's true isn't it, we've done that."

Martha was determined to re-model her-self outside of the label of 'learning difficulty'. She had been caught within the 'pseudo-scientific' definitions of eugenics in the 1930's. She said to me, 'If I have a learning difficulty, it must be a very mild one.' The ability to be a university student was for her an important recognition of her intelligence.

She carried on, 'I was also interested in your life. When you told me you'd been to a convent and all that well, it made it easier.'

This comment confirms the perspective that personal involvement in interviewing assists the research. However I would go further and argue that it is impossible not to be a 'person', a 'self' in research. I asked Martha, "Was there any time you thought, Oh no it's that Mary again what a nuisance?"

> "Oh no don't be silly, well there was the one time I had that awful cold, but you didn't stay remember, but no. I'm really interested in what you're doing anyway.
>
> "Do you think anything's changed 'cause of our talks, in you, I mean?"
>
> "Changed? that's a good one. You mean like, do I feel different about things?"
>
> "Yes sort of."
>
> "Well you know me, I want people to know I'm here and the talking and sorting it all out helps that. I suppose I feel I'm more here."

Reflecting on the relationship

An important concern in oral history work centres on the nature of the power relationship between the researcher and the researched. As researchers we can spend time with people and be seen to take away parts of their lives to use as we will. I was concerned for this not to be the case in my project but Martha had overtaken me. She had her own agenda in agreeing to spend time with me. She had seen me as a way of finishing her course. She was not passive in the process. The power relationship was not one way. I attempted to leave the research in a sort of space between myself and the woman who was telling me her story. We agreed that as I wrote work up I would discuss it with the women concerned. What was significant to me was the way the women used me to expand their horizons. I had not envisaged this happening. In Martha's case, she had, from our first meeting, planned to ask me to help her with her course.

Doing research with people in this intimate way, means we cannot be outsiders, or an audience in the process of research. It is clear to me that we are actively involved in shaping and changing people's perceptions of them-selves and they of our-selves. We are neither of us, researcher or researched, rigid personality structures unable to negotiate a meeting space. Being aware of this flexibility does help break down the traditional power structures within the research process. It also alters the parameters of research. It expects a different 'final product', as well as a different approach in the research moment itself. It is essential that we too, our-selves, not just our research, are open to scrutiny.

FOOTNOTES

1. Ann Oakley (1981), p. 41 in *Doing Feminist Research*, Ed Helen Roberts, Routledge.
2. Liz Stanley (1992), *The Auto/Biographical I*, Manchester University Press. See also a number of relevant articles in the special issue of *Sociology*, Vol. 27 No. 1, February 1993.
3. George Herbert Mead (1934), *Self*.
4. This name is a pseudonym chosen by 'Martha'.
5. *Patterns for Living* (1986), devised as an Open University half credit course.

Adult learning and life histories: opportunities and issues for qualitative research at the British Mass-Observation Archive

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THIS paper outlines the early stages of a project researching adult learning and life histories. A data set of 453 educational life histories which are available at the Mass-Observation Archive in the University of Sussex provides a superb resource for educational research. In the paper I discuss the background to the project and outline a range of ways in which these life histories might be used by researchers, and some of the issues arising from such research. At the conference I will provide a selection of excerpts for workshop discussion.

From oral history to adult education

A further, implicit concern of the paper is the way in which the life history of the researcher shapes the research agenda and research approaches. This research is an attempt to connect my own background in oral history with a new role as an adult education researcher, and to bring theoretical issues and approaches from life history work into adult education research.

My academic training is in the field of history, and for much of my working life I have been employed as an oral historian in community, institutional and academic oral history projects. Like many oral historians an initial and on-going impetus for seeking oral testimony has been to recover voices from below, the stories of individuals and communities whose lives have been hidden from history. Yet in the 1970s these democratic aspirations and methods of the resurgant oral history movement were subjected to savage criticisms by traditional, documentary historians. The main thrust of the criticisms was that memory was unreliable as a historical source because it was distorted by the deterioration of age, by personal bias and nostalgia, and by the influence of other, subsequent versions of the past. Underlying these criticisms was concern about the democratisation of the historians' craft being facilitated by oral history groups, and disparagement of oral history's apparent 'discrimination' in favour of women, workers and migrant groups. Goaded by the taunts of documentary historians, the early handbooks of oral history developed a canon to assess the reliability of oral memory (while shrewdly reminding the traditionalists that documentary sources were no less selective and biased). From social psychology and anthropology they showed how to determine the bias and fabulation of memory, the significance of retrospection and the effects of the interviewer upon remembering. From sociology they adopted methods of representative sampling, and from documentary history they brought basic rules for checking the reliability and internal consistency of their source. The new canon provided useful signposts for reading memories, and for combining them with other historical sources to find out what happened in the past.[1]

However, the tendency to defend and use oral history as just another historical source to find out 'how it really was' led to neglect of other values of oral testimony. In their efforts to correct bias and fabulation some practitioners lost sight of the reasons why individuals compose their memories in particular ways, and did not see how the process of remembering could be a key to understanding the ways in which certain individual and collective versions of the past are active in the present. By seeking to discover one single, fixed and recoverable history, some oral historians tended to neglect the multivalence of individual memory and the plurality of versions of the past provided by different speakers (as well as different documentary sources). They did not see that the 'distortions' of memory could be a resource as much as a problem. In recent years oral historians have become more interested in exploring the relationships between memory and subjectivity, and between collective memory and remembering. We are now more self-conscious about the distinctive character of oral testimony, and assert the theoretical and methodological values of the qualitative approach in oral history research.[2] As Paul Thompson commented in the editorial of *Oral History* in Autumn 1989:

> Our early somewhat naive methodological debates and enthusiasm for testimonies of 'how it really was' have matured into a shared understanding of the basic technical and human issues of our craft, and equally important, a much more subtle appreciation of how every life story inextricably intertwines both objective and subjective evidence — of different, but equal value.[3]

For example, in my own oral history research about Australian war veterans, I moved from exploring the hidden histories of working class soldiers to assessing the impact of the Australian national war legend (the Anzac legend) upon veterans' memories and identities.[4] More recently, now that I have moved into adult education work (in one sense a natural progression from community oral history projects which often served as a site for informal adult education and learning) I am trying to bring the new theoretical and methodologial approaches in oral history to bear upon adult education history research. A proposed joint Sussex-Kent oral history project will contrast the diverse experiences of organisers, tutors and students in the inter-war tutorial class movement, and will explore how stories from below compare with the accepted histories of the movement. But we will also be exploring how those histories, and the collective memories or myths of adult education, have influenced the memories of participants, how the potent experience of adult education shaped the identities of adult learners, and how the present-day identities of our interviewees affect their remembering. This approach will help us to understand both the historical nature of the tutorial class movement and its continuing resonance for individuals and society.[5]

Autobiographical writing and the Mass-Observation archive

The criticisms suffered by oral historians and oral testimony have also been directed at research using autobiographical writing, and indeed at qualitative research data and methods in general. The example with which I am most familiar is the debate about the Mass-Observation project and archive. Mass-Observation (M-O) was a British social research organisation influenced by earlier Polish and Chicago sociological traditions of using life documents for research. It operated between 1937 and 1950 and recruited volunteers to join a 'panel' of writers recording aspects of their everyday life. In 1981, the Tom Harrisson Mass-Observation Archive, which houses the diaries and detailed questionnaire responses produced by the original project, initiated a revival of the panel of volunteer writers.

The new M-O was closely related to the development of oral history in the 1970s and 1980s and its aims of validating the lived experiences of 'ordinary people'. Yet the new project differs from oral history by specialising in written material and accumulating sets of autobiographical writing about contemporary rather than past experience. Three or four times a year panel members are invited to respond to open-ended and discursive questionnaires (Directives) about subjects ranging from international and domestic political issues to everyday personal practices. Occasionally panelists are asked to provide detailed one day diaries, or to record their experiences during the course of a particular event (such as the Falkland and Gulf Wars, and the 1992 General Election). Over 400,000 pages of typed and hand-written material have been amassed, representing the contributions of over 2,500 volunteer writers from all over the United Kingdom.

In the years between the two M-O projects, quantitative sociologists denounced the research validity of M-O material and targetted the inaccuracy of recall, the likelihood of fictionalisation, and the unrepresentativeness of a small sample of self-selected respondents. Researchers using either set of M-O material need to meet those criticisms. In response to the latter criticism of the 'unrepresentative sample', it is perfectly possible to produce a profile of M-O writers (including details such as occupational status, gender, age and regional location), and to compare the profile of respondents to a particular directive with the national profile. Indeed, the Archive is currently facilitating such approaches by producing a computerised database of respondents.

However, as Dorothy Sheridan argues, '"representativeness" itself is ideologically constructed; its dominant meaning focusses on the individual, a single voice, and on the assumption that people can only be seen to represent themselves, and that the quality of representativeness lies *not in what they say*, but in *who they are* (as defined by selected socio-economic characteristics)'. Sheridan, who is both Archivist and researcher at M-O, asks us to consider who and what the Mass-Observers are writing for and representing. She argues that they often write for 'the experience of others sharing the same or similar historical experiences'. Their writing 'is at the same time singular and collective'. Furthermore, Mass-Observers also write for an audience of inscribed or imagined readers ('people like them', descendants, the archivist, future readers, posterity), so that their writing is negotiated and shaped in relation to that perceived audience.[6]

Sheridan's analysis of M-O writing, which is detailed in a number of publications, takes M-O researchers beyond the narrow criticisms of quantitative positivists, and opens up exciting issues about the forms, meanings and significance of different types of life history documents. Sheridan reasserts 'the privileged access which autobiography can provide into a dimension of human reality which would be difficult to come to from other means:

> Through autobiography we may come to learn about people's hopes and fears, their individual choices in relation to wider social and political change, their rational and unconscious motives for acting, and, above all, the meaning and significance which they give their lives.[7]

For example, I found M-O diaries to be an invaluable source to find out how British people of diverse backgrounds and experiences responded to the Falklands War and the Gulf War. I used the material to help students explore the complex relationships between nationalist ideologies and popular support (and opposition). Other researchers have used the contemporary Archive material to explore issues ranging from the changing pace of life, attitudes to the weather and environmental change, literacy practices and personal cleanliness. M-O material is enriching both the findings and the presentation of social research.

Mass-Observation and educational research

Paul Armstrong has produced an invaluable essay and guide book which outlines practical and theoretical issues for using life history methods in educational research.[8] He notes that in the past educational research has also been dominated by the quantitative paradigm, but that in recent years there has been a resurgance of research using qualitative strategies. Armstrong lists the following multifaceted contributions which the life history method makes to educational research: it facilitates exploratory studies and complements other source material; it enables exploration of individual subjectivity and of process and change in life history; it helps researchers to locate particular experiences within individuals' overall life histories, as well as in the broad socio-historical background; and it encourages critical analysis of educational assumptions and generalisations. Qualitative approaches also facilitate praxis (making links between theory and practice) and participatory research, both of which have been significant features of much adult education research, and arguably adult education's major contributions to research methodology.

Armstrong lists a number of adult education research projects which have used life history methods. To his list might be added current British projects such as the research into the motivations of Access students being conducted by Fenia Alexopoulou and Linden West, and Mary Stuart's investigations into the educational life histories of women who have been socially defined as having learning difficulties.[9]

As far as I am aware, M-O has not yet been used for substantial educational research, though it has rich research possibilities in this field. The first part of the Spring Directive of 1991 focused on education (subsequent sections posed questions about the uses of reading and writing, and about taking risks), and is appended. It asked Mass Observers to outline their educational life histories and to reflect upon their experiences of education. 'Education' was defined to include lifelong (formal) learning: 'don't forget to start right at the beginning (nurseries? playgroups?) and bring it right up to date with evening classes and adult education if it applies to you'. Panelists were also asked to record their own thoughts about the value of education, and about the present situation of education in Britain.

Responses to the Education Directive from 453 Mass Observers now fill four archive boxes, and range from hand written single sheets to book length educational life histories. Becky Garrett, a volunteer in the Archive, has performed an invaluable service for subsequent researchers by profiling Education Directive respondents. She has established that the Directive had a comparatively low response rate (41% of panelists). The gender balance of the 453 respondents — 345 were women and 108 were men — roughly matches that of the panel as a whole. A higher proportion of male respondents were in the older age brackets (two-thirds in their 60s or 70s), while the women were more evenly spread out in the 30 to 80 age span, with the highest proportion in their 60s. The south east of England had the highest geographical representation (28.1% of women and 37.12% of men), but most other regions were reasonably well represented. It is very difficult to ascertain the ethnic background of Mass-Observers, as to date such information has not been gathered or collated. Nor is there an occupational or class breakdown of the Education respondents, though Garrett has established, for example, that about a quarter of the male respondents were graduates.[10] Using the computer database of Mass-Observers which is currently in preparation (for the moment it only includes female observers), it will be possible to contrast the profile of Education Directive respondents with that of Mass-Observers in general and with the British population as a whole. Becky Garrett has also produced a document which summarises the educational life history of each respondent under the categories of pre-school, infant and junior school, secondary school, further and higher education, and adult education. She notes that there is 'a good deal of overlap and there remains considerable work in classifying "grey areas", for example, extra-curricular activities during school years... and the variety of different forms of education subsumed under "further/higher" and "adult". These last two categories need to be more precisely broken down in future analysis'. Despite such reservations, the summary sheets are an invaluable short cut into the life histories, and suggest the range and richness of the life history material as a source for research about adult education and learning (I will provide a summary sheet handout at the conference).

Using the Education Directive

The Mass-Observation educational life histories might be used in the following ways for adult education research (other fields of education will have additional issues and concerns):

1. To pose underlying theoretical and methodological questions, such as:
    - how do people remember and articulate their educational life histories, and what are the factors influencing that articulation (writing for M-O, the nature of the directive, the age, educational background, occupation and gender of respondents)?
    - who responded to this directive and why (influential factors as above), and how does the profile of respondents compare with that of Mass-Observers in general, and of the British population as a whole?
    - what if anything is special or distinctive about the educational experiences and attitudes of respondents (compared with the results of national quantitative or questionnaire surveys), and to what extent can any differences be attributed to the selective nature of the sample, or to the contribution of qualitative life history evidence which highlights the perspectives of adult learners (and non-participants)?
2. To explore specific issues about the nature of adult education and learning:
    - how are the nature and values of different educational stages perceived?
    - what are the relationships between school experiences and post-school education (or non-participation)?
    - what are the motivations for participation or non-participation?
    - what has been the take-up and significance of different forms of post-school education (higher education, vocational training and continuing professional education, liberal adult education, so-called 'leisure classes', distance learning, informal learning...)?
    - what is perceived or defined as 'education' or 'educational', and how might the wording of the directive have shaped those definitions?
    - what has been positive or negative about adult education experience?
    - what factors facilitated or hindered participation in education at different life stages?
    - what have been the varieties of educational pathways and learning routes?
    - what have been the outcomes of adult education?
    - how have particular educational experiences shaped attitudes to contemporary issues, including contemporary education policy?
3. We might also consider responses to those questions by specific groupings of respondents: men compared to women; different occupational groups or social classes; graduates compared with people without formal educational qualifications; regional distinctions; age cohorts — younger as opposed to adult respondents.
4. We could chart changes in educational experiences, over time and for different age cohorts: for example, how was the education of the generation which grew up in the 1940s affected by the war, and how has that experience influenced their subsequent attitudes to, and experiences of, education?
5. Or we could focus on the processes and changes in individual educational life histories, charting the changing interconnections between social and educational contexts, motivations, needs and experiences (we might even go beyond the Directive responses to produce an additional Directive, or to interview a number of respondents in more detail).

A workshop case study

In the last part of this session I hope we can break into smaller groups to read and discuss two of the Directive responses, for which I will provide photocopies. I don't wish to direct that discussion, and will be interested to hear what you make of the writing, and the issues and discussion which it provokes. The two respondents are identified by their M-O number — for reasons of confidentiality names are not supplied to researchers. The background information which is readily available (but which might be supplemented by reading other Directive replied by the same panelists, including the autobiographical piece which they supplied upon joining M-O), is as follows:

A1223: female, 66 years, retired clerk.
B1520, male, 71 years, retired printer.

Footnotes

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[1] For a summary of conservative criticisms, see Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1988, pp. 68-71, and his editorial in *Oral History* 18, 1, Spring 1990, p. 24. For the Australian debate see the 'Oral History: Facts and Fiction' exchange in *Oral History Association of Australia Journal* 5, 1983-84, passim.

[2] See the 'Popular Memory' issue of *Oral History* 18, 1, Spring 1990; the revised discussion of memory and subjectivity in Thompson, *The Voice of the Past*, 1988, pp. 150-165; the debates in the *International Journal of Oral History* 6, February 1985; the international anthology edited by Raphael Samuel and Paul Thompson, *Myths We Live By*, Routledge, London, 1990; and my own adaption of these ideas in 'Using Memory Biography to Explore Masculine and National Identities: an Australian Case Study', in Valeria Di Piazza (ed.), *Memory and Multiculturalism, Papers from the VIIIth*

International Oral History Conference, Universita degli Studi di Siena, 1993. For similar developments in the United States see David Thelen, 'Memory and American History', *Journal of American History* 75, 4, March 1989, pp. 1117-1129; and Michael Frisch, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History,* State University of New York, Albany, 1990. For Australia see John Murphy, 'The voice of memory: history, autobiography and oral memory', *Historical Studies,* 22, 87, October 1986, pp. 45-54. For ways in which psychology has also taken on these ideas, see David Middleton and Derek Edwards, *Collective Remembering,* Sage, London, 1990.

[3] *Oral History* 17, 2, Autumn 1989, p. 2.

[4] *Living With the Legend: Oral History and Anzac Memories,* forthcoming, Oxford University Press, 1994.

[5] Linden West, Alistair Thomson and Alec Barbrook, 'Myth, Remembering and Oral History in British Adult Education', ESRC Proposal, March 1993.

[6] Dorothy Sheridan, 'Writing For.... Questions of representation/representativeness, authorship and audience', Unpublished paper, University of Sussex, 1993.

[7] Dorothy Sheridan, 'Writing to the Archive: Mass-Observation as Autobiography', *Sociology,* 27, 1, February 1993, p. 28. See also Dorothy Sheridan, '"Ordinary hardworking folk?"; volunteer writers in Mass-Observation 1937-50 and 1981-91', *Feminist Praxis* 36/37, forthcoming 1993; Dorothy Sheridan (ed.), *The Tom Harrison Mass-Observation Archive, A Guide For Researchers,* University of Sussex Library, April 1991.

[8] Paul F. Armstrong, *Qualitative Strategies in Social and Educational Research: The Life History Method in Theory and Practice,* Newland Papers Number 14, University of Hull School of Ad. and Cont. Education, 1987.

[9] Fenia Alexopoulou and Linden West, 'Motivations of Access Students', Sussex Continuing Education Research Forum, 8 March 1993; Mary Stuart, '"Speaking Personally"" the "self" in educational oral history work,' in this volume. SCUTREA 1993 (forthcoming).

[10] Becky Garrett, 'Analysis of Panel replies to the Spring 1991 (Part 1) Directive, personal experiences and attitudes towards education, Report of Work in Progress', Unpublished paper, Mass-Observation Archive, University of Sussex, 27 May 1992.

Appendix 1

MO SPRING DIRECTIVE 1991

There's a lot here! Take a deep breath and read it through first. Answer at your leisure. Remember - this might be the last directive.

The first part of this directive is about education - your own experiences as a young person and in your adult life, as a parent (if you are one), and your observations and views on the current situation. The second part of the directive has been prepared in collaboration with Dr Brian Street, a social anthropologist with a special interest in the practice of reading and writing in different cultures. There is a short Part III which is about the risks we take in everyday life. Professor Sandra Wallman, the Archive's new trustee, is especially interested in your answers to these questions.

Please bear in mind that these points are mainly for guidance. You should feel free to include additional points if you think it is relevant. And if you can't respond to a point, or if you feel it isn't relevant to your situation, please say so.

PART I: EDUCATION

About you

Please start by listing your own schools and colleges with dates and your age. This is NOT another request for a Self Portrait! We just want the bare bones. You don't have to provide the full names of places but it would be useful if you could indicate what kinds of institutions they were.

Please include a note of any qualifications you received. Don't forget to start right at the beginning (nurseries? playgroups?) and bring it right up to date with evening classes and adult education if it applies to you. Please include apprenticeships and day release and any other training schemes you can think of. The rule is - if in doubt, include it.

If you are (or have been) employed in education - in any capacity - please say so in block capitals at the beginning of your reply. You might also like to comment at some point on how your experience within education influences your views.

Looking back

What do you feel you got out of your education? What would you have like to have got out of it? Do you have any regrets? Do you feel that your education prepared you for your adult life? Do you consider your education over?

Please write as fully as you feel able covering, if you can, the different stages of your schooling, your relationships with teachers and other pupils/students and the attitudes of your parents and other family members to your education.

The value of education

In your opinion, what should education be for? Who should decide what is to be taught? And who should pay for it? How important is it compared to other priorities in the national budget?

Education today

What are your views on the present situation in Britain? Please comment not only on schools but on the whole spectrum of education.

Obviously this is a vast subject and you won't be able to cover everything uinless you are very enthusiastic! Can I suggest that you concentrate on those themes you think are the most important and relevant. Please illustrate with your own experience and observations wherever possible. You may want to compare past with present.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

On keeping a diary: a new approach to reflective practice

Linden West and Fenia Alexopoulou
University of Kent

Introduction

THIS paper considers the concept of research diaries and their role in nurturing reflective practice within qualitative, interpretive research. Our interest in research diaries emerged in thinking about Access student motivation and its meaning in the totality of a person's life history. Our aim was to improve the practice of research by using diaries to encourage critical reflection, individually and in collaboration. As Usher and Bryant[1] have suggested, good research, and the conditions for its realisation, depend upon a continuous negotiation and reflection in action by researchers — before, during and after any investigation.

The nature of life history/autobiographical research makes reflectivity and self-awareness on the part of researchers critically important. The process of depth interviewing may, unwittingly, shatter an interviewee's personal allusions or myths and increase anxiety as well as insight. There are troubling questions in all interviews about how far to go, about how much to delve in turbulent, murky waters. Moreover, the act of *inter*viewing is, as the word implies, a shared encounter in which the behaviour of one person shapes that of the other; in which the researcher's personality, psyche, more general state of being and capacity to relate, as well as ideological orientation, may be crucial to understanding the interaction and its interpretation.

Critical reflectivity, and self-awareness, may be especially important where great empathy, even solidarity, with interviewees is essential to gaining co-operation and trust. Empathy and commitment bring the danger of muddle: the agenda and needs of the researcher and researched become entangled. Confidence in self-expression as well as knowledge of research and its language, (and the distribution of power which results), are uneven. We may inadvertently end up with the interviewees mirroring the researcher rather than any understanding of the interviewees themselves.

Usher and Bryant[2] have suggested, that the process of understanding individuals and, by extension, the research encounter, is analogous to hermeneutics — the study of ancient text in order to interpret its underlying and often obscure meaning. This analogy might therefore apply equally to researchers. They too are crucial to understanding what may be happening and their 'text' may also be obscure and requiring elaboration.

All of which underlines the necessity of an open, critical reflectiveness on the part of researchers, about themselves in general and towards the research more specifically. We hoped that creating diaries might contribute to the emergence of such a culture in our project.

The idea of a diary for reflective practice

Diaries have a well-established place in educational research and Burgess[3] among others, has written of their importance to 'ethnographic' research. He suggests that diaries can be used for four main purposes: to make field notes of a substantive, methodological or analytic kind; to record participants' accounts; to generate further data to complement observational and interview material; and to compare data from researchers with those from informants.

These four functions were relevant to our work. We planned to interview a small group of students, in-depth, on a number of separate occasions — before, during and after a course. The interviews were to be complemented by participant observation in the classroom as well as conversations with significant others, including tutors. We therefore required the means to record as many impressions as we could, to assist us in understanding changes in individual student perceptions as well as to chart the evolution of the research itself.

But there was a further, ambitious refinement to the above. Conventionally, the diary's prime use is to observe and comment on the research subjects as well as the evolution of the research itself with less emphasis placed on the phenomenology of the researchers themselves. The task of self-reflection in any systematic sense, of surfacing what might otherwise lie hidden or obscured, is either overlooked, considered subsidiary, or, worst of all, dismissed as bad science. We wanted to be more honest and to problematise practice by identifying and sharing informal or private theories in use as research workers as well as understand ourselves better as practitioners.

There were three main influences in our use of diaries in this particular way. First, the writings of Schön[4] and Bright[5] pointing to the critical role of public and private 'theories in use' in understanding professional behaviour. The notion of 'theories in use' can include conscious and publicly expressed opinions and rationalisations as well as private, concealed, and even unconscious factors. A private 'theory' might involve reservations about a particular research method which it may be difficult to articulate publicly; unconscious factors might include behaviours which contradict stated positions — someone, for example, who espouses warmth and empathy in research appearing cold and distant in practice.

The importance of 'theories in use' may of course be denied or obscured in a language of technical rationality. But Schön and Bright argue that good practitioners will bring all such 'theories', private as well as public, to the surface, at least to themselves, however uncomfortable this might be.

They point to the reality that the private 'theories in use' are either absent from, or their role ignored, in many conventional research accounts. Research is often presented in a highly sanitised, disguised way; as Usher and Bryant have asserted: *'the hunches, assumptions, false starts, informal theories and inner reflections of the investigators*[6] are excluded for fear of appearing to be 'unscientific' or overly subjective. There is too often pretence, even deception, at the heart of many research accounts.

The second influence was psychotherapy with particular regard to unintended, unanticipated dynamics in the research encounter. It has already been suggested that the researcher, consciously and unconsciously, may have a profound effect on the researched. It is axiomatic in all forms of therapy that the therapist has a profound impact on clients. This might include, for example, transference issues where the therapist represents a significant figure from the client's past and his/her behaviour can only be understood in that light. The analogy with in-depth research is obvious. While the act of reflecting on and seeking to interpret a life history may not be explicitly therapeutic, powerful dynamics of a similar kind may be triggered.

Al Thomson's experience[7] of interviewing former Anzac soldiers illustrates the point. He has shown, with great honesty, how his emotional investment in some old, 'forgotten' working class men is partly explained by the significant nurturing role of an elderly, semi-retired army batman in childhood (Al was a product of a middle class military family). He became aware that the research was partly driven by a need to recapture the warmth and meaning of this highly significant other. Moreover, some of the old men found in him — a young healthy well educated man from a military family — a powerful personal resonance which locked into material from their own youth including pain and deep frustration. It was as if they were looking at an idealised version of themselves, a life that might have been.

Marion Milner's work[8] provides the third influence, alongside personal experience. Milner, a distinguished psychoanalyst, kept a diary over many years. Her diary acted as a bridge between different levels of psychic functioning, integrating mind and body, thinking and feeling, concepts and percepts, reason and imagination. Professional and personal puzzles which may have confused or irritated would, over time and with patience, become startlingly clear. Linden too has kept a diary for a number of years and had similar experiences. Using prose, poetry, drawing and non-discursive symbols to explore the interconnections between different experience has been a means to both professional as well as personal insight. But using diaries in an intensely personal way is of course quite different from sharing them in collaborative research. It may simply not be appropriate to do so. While the freedom to withhold information was therefore absolute we nonetheless decided to try to create greater understanding, mutual openness and reflectivity by sharing some of the material most directly relating to the research to discover how much this might, or might not, enhance the project overall.

Experience so far

The first diary was written by Linden and Fenia produced the next. Linden's diary contained a lengthy, chronological account of early meetings, interpretations of pilot interview material and an exploration of personal motivation in undertaking research of this kind.

In the diary Linden analyzed, on the basis of his reading, interests and personal experience, the concept of the 'self' as a way of thinking further about the processes involved; the pilot material, alongside the ideas of psychanalytic writers such as Frosh[9], suggested that students could be seen as being engaged in a reconstruction of identity, of building different selves. The individual experiences an existing self as distorted or restricted as, perhaps, significant others touch the deepest chords of uncertainty, envy or trigger an awareness of a self which might have been. There are feelings that the existing self, as in much women's writing, is false and that the emergence of a deeper, truer self has been frustrated.

Fenia was interested in a more sociological notion of an encounter with change and, as Courtney[10] puts it, the act of participation being understood as evidence of a desire or lack of desire for change. One may argue there is much overlap and potential compatibility between these ideas.

The diary encouraged an early, intense debate about the theoretical rationale underlying the research — which frameworks offered the most useful starting point for our work. The original project proposal had emphasised socio-psychological concepts such as marginality and transition, hypothesising that students might be in transition between worlds whose norms and values conflict. Education was a means to resolve conflict at a social and psychological level; to affiliate to a new community or group or to retreat into a previous identity were potential 'solutions' to what could be thought of as an unstable state. The diary enabled the concept of the self and the management of change to be debated alongside these initial ideas in an open, extensive way.

The second diary focused on crucial questions such as the diary's purpose, its aims, what it should contain as well as how the life experiences and personality of the researchers can influence a project. One of the practical problems raised in this second diary was that diaries are very time consuming: the use of tapes offered one possible solution to this difficulty.

The climate between us became generally supportive as one encouraged the other to reflect, voice ideas and express feelings on an equal basis. Self-reflection and reflection in action are about experimenting, uncertainty, unpredictability, risk and even loss of control. There were times we experienced feelings of hurt, impatience, anger, defensiveness...but the diaries encouraged the beginnings of real self-expression, self-description, and shared understanding.

Most importantly, the diary forced us to confront major questions of power, authority and role very early on which might otherwise have lain dormant or been denied. At one level the arguments were about the composition of an advisory group and the ownership of knowledge — who was generating the ideas and whether their source was being appropriately acknowledged. At another, the issue was one of ownership and control in the project. While great stress was placed on equality in the team, the reality was conceived differently by the two of us. Fenia was on a short term contract, her status was temporary and there seemed a potentially unequal relationship in the extent of field work and decision making. No doubt there are other ways of surfacing difficult issues such as these except the diary seems to be a particularly good one.

In this paper we have argued that questions of power, control as well as the role and importance of personal 'theories', and the researcher's subjectivity more generally, are ignored in much research. Like the denial of anger or frustration at a very personal level, to ignore conflict might prove more damaging in the long run. To ignore private theories and personal agendas is to simplify and distort a research process. Our hope is that surfacing the issues early, which a diary allows, might mean some pain today but profit, deeper reciprocity and insight tomorrow ... The process continues.

FOOTNOTES

1. Robin Usher and Ian Bryant, *Adult Education as Theory, Practice and Research, the Captive Triangle* (Routledge 1989) p167.
2. *Ibid* p29.
3. Robert Burgess, 'Keeping a Research Diary' in Judith Bell *et al*, *Conducting Small Scale Investigations in Educational Management* (PCP, 1984) pp.198-205.
4. Donald A. Schön, *Educating the Reflective Practitioner* (Jossey-Bass 1987)
5. Barry Bright, 'Adults: Professional Culture in Practice' in Nod Miller and Linden West (eds), *Changing Culture and Adult Learning*, SCUTREA, 1992.
6. Robin Usher and Ian Bryant, *op cit* p193.
7. Alastair Thomson, *Living with the Legend: Oral History and Anzac Memories* (Oxford) forthcoming.
8. See Marion Milner, *Eternity's Sunrise, A Way of Keeping a Diary* (Virago 1987).
9. Stephen Frosh, *Identity Crisis, Modernity, Psychoanalysis and the Self* (Macmillan 1991)
10. Sean Courtney, *Why Adults Learn: Towards a Theory of Participation in Adult Education* (Routledge 1992)

4. Practitioner-based research

Introduction by David J. Jones
University of Nottingham

THIS set of papers is about practitioner-based research and draws on the experience of those who are teachers, students or organisers in adult education. Generally the research is carried out by the practitioners themselves, though there are occasionally inputs and guidance from professional academic researchers. Much of this work is done by adult educators studying for a higher degree.

There is, of course, a danger that practitioners are too close to the events or phenomena being studied and a danger that they find it difficult to be impartial, that they have a vested interest. This issue is addressed by Anderson, Boud and Sampson in their paper 'Issues in researching a common practice' where they address the problems inherent in researching what others might find commonplace and produce guidelines for this type of research. Mary Thorpe, in her paper 'Practitioners as researchers — or is it evaluation? and does it matter?' similarly offers guidelines. She describes what she considers to be an appropriate stance for practitioners researching/evaluating curricula and argues that this sort of evaluation is different from the classic academic approach to research.

Peter Watson in 'Adult educators' reflections on M.Ed. research projects which they had undertaken' looks at the issues from the point of view of the research supervisor and similarly warns against the dangers of bias when a tutor elicits information from students, in this case students on an M.Ed. course. Issues concerning possible bias and the classic need for objectivity are also raised by Hazel Hampton and William Hampton in 'Practitioner research as continuing self-education'. These authors see research as a quest for understanding rather than proof and question the need for objectivity; they prefer to value the subjective experiences of the researcher and the researched and advocate co-operative enquiry groups as a research method.

Issues around the relationship between the researcher and the researched are also addressed by Mike Davis in his paper, 'Practitioner-based enquiry: in-service teacher education as a research environment'. He explores the tensions which exist between the needs of practitioners and the ability of the researcher to meet them.

Finally, Ian Bryant examines how adult educators, as practitioners, understand the concept of 'reflective practice' and make use of it in their teaching and professional development. In his paper, 'Whose line is it anyway? The use of transcripts in researching reflective practice', he looks at the act of transcribing interviews as reflective practice and asks important questions about the authorship of the transcript.

What all these papers have in common is a focus on issues of bias and objectivity in practitioner-based research. These theme is approached in different ways but remains central. Ethical and philosophical questions are raised about the ownership of research and about the need for, even the existence of, a classically objective approach to this type of research.

Issues in researching a common practice

Geoff Anderson, David Boud and Jane Sampson
University of Technology, Sydney

AS a field of study adult education has traditionally drawn upon the experiences of practitioners to develop many of its theoretical frameworks. The linkages between research and practice have always been close and remain so. However a field which relies heavily upon practitioner-based knowledge is also likely to be a field which contains shared but untested assumptions. This can create difficulties in researching what has become the common practice in a particular setting as the researchers may appear to be challenging embedded values and beliefs. Yet unless we review our practice and question our assumptions we are failing to apply our own professed belief in the importance of critical reflection and continuous evaluation.

Thirteen years ago the forerunner of the School of Adult and Language Education at the University of Technology, Sydney, introduced into its first purpose-designed courses for adult educators an idea which many considered radical. This was to allow adults to negotiate what they wished to study and how they wished to be assessed. The aim was to make undergraduate and postgraduate professional courses more relevant to the individual needs of participants with diverse backgrounds, most of whom were also experienced practitioners. To achieve this a system of learning contracts negotiated between students and their course advisers was introduced (the practice was strongly influenced by the writings of Knowles 1975, 1986).

Since that time the innovation has become the common practice and is pervasive across all courses offered by the School. While many of the initiators of the practice are still with the School they have been joined over the years by newer staff, including many part-timers, and a constantly changing student population. This leads to a continuing challenge to people encountering the system for the first time as they have to reconcile it with their existing notions of assessment in higher education. Yet over the years it has become difficult to question either the assumptions upon which the practice is based or the manner in which it is being implemented. To ask questions about the basic practice may appear to challenge the strongly held values of staff and indeed the very identity of the School itself.

To research what has become a common practice requires a critical perspective which may be difficult to acknowledge by those whose immediate concern lies in making the practice work. Unless there emerges a general realisation that the practice has substantially departed from the intention, some other trigger may be needed to encourage people to return to the original assumptions and assess their current relevance. There are many reasons why people closely involved with the practice are reluctant to do this.

A consensus of silence

A survey of staff in the School (Anderson, Boud and Sampson, in press) revealed more variations in the use of learning contracts than had been expected. Staff were modifying the original system to suit their own preferred style of working, the needs of their students or the nature of their courses. Yet they were not making these changes public. Staff raised concerns in the initial survey which had not previously been expressed. In short, prior to the survey there seemed to be a consensus of silence.

We considered the possible reasons for this. It seemed to us that when a practice evolves over a period of time small accommodations are sometimes made on a small scale without the wider context being considered. Changes which occur solely as local variations or to suit a particular circumstance are not generally publicised since they seldom affect the integrity of the original conception. The individuals who make these changes may be hesitant to challenge that which has been institutionally endorsed and which seems to be generally well-accepted by professional colleagues. Thus minor variations occur while the system itself remains intact. Moreover, the philosophy and commitment shared by the original innovators may not be understood to the same extent by those who have joined since and were therefore not party to the original decisions and this may lead to the introduction of variations which depart from the earlier conception. Perhaps the institutional culture has been inadequately transmitted or the original imperatives have changed. Perhaps too it is difficult to expound and gain commitment to a philosophy of education during the normal induction of new staff.

Other factors are also at work here. For example, apart from course handbooks there is little shared documentation and little opportunity to discuss variations to teaching practices beyond a few departmental colleagues. After many years of successful practice a degree of inertia is understandable—if it appears to be working well, why change it? To modify one's own practice could be interpreted as a lack of faith in the popular conception, hence there is a strong incentive not to acknowledge such modifications more openly. In addition to this is the fact that the micropolitics of change can be difficult for individuals to grasp, especially when they feel dependent upon more experienced or more senior staff to display leadership initiatives. Those with formal responsibility for course administration would be expected to initiate changes to the system and for others to take the lead may be seen as undermining their role. Such a situation exists even when there are good personal relationships between those involved; when this is not the case the initiation of change becomes even more problematic. Responses to the staff survey suggested an awareness of certain problems with the use of learning contracts but it seemed staff were prepared to accept these as they would the foibles of a familiar friend. In an academic environment there is usually a considerable tolerance of ambiguity and a willingness to accept the idiosyncratic practices of colleagues. We trust the professional judgements of those we work with even if we do not always agree with them. While this may be beneficial for workplace harmony it does not follow that the system itself benefits. So while there was an awareness that the system could be improved there was a reluctance to initiate such improvement.

Researching the practice

It is unwise in a situation such as this to set out to find problems. Cooperation and support can hardly be built on the basis of fault-finding. Instead we approached staff in the School as expert practitioners and colleagues to ascertain the qualities they looked for in both learning contract proposals and in completed work. In this way a picture of what constituted a 'good' learning contract would emerge together with an indication of how the current system was working.

The trigger for the research was provided by a new Head of School who had a particular interest in negotiated learning and assessment and who was aware as an outsider of the extent of the innovation which to insiders had become commonplace. Joining him in the team which formed was a relatively new staff member and a course coordinator well known for her advocacy of the teaching approaches espoused by the School. There was a range of scepticism and commitment reflected in the members of the team but all valued an active role for students in decisions about their learning.

The project was conceived as research, not evaluation, and would celebrate achievements as much as anything, since the system enjoyed a good informal reputation overall both inside and outside the School. The importance of retaining the trust of the staff and respecting their professional values was recognised from the outset. For this reason the process did not start with the soliciting of views of students, critics or outside parties (such as employers), but with the staff. Following an open-ended questionnaire to collect information and opinions we held individual discussions and a group workshop to clarify and organise the information staff had supplied.

The value of learning contracts in practitioner education was strongly confirmed. The variations uncovered and the concerns expressed allowed a fuller and more fruitful discussion of assessment issues than had previously been possible. A School retreat and several departmental meetings used the ideas generated by the research to help formulate policies and approaches. Staff were also interested to hear the views of students and thus a major survey of over one hundred students was subsequently undertaken (Sampson, Anderson and Boud, 1992). This revealed some quite different concerns, particularly to do with initial orientation and support. The implications of the views of students are currently being worked through and an orientation manual for students and staff is being developed.

Lessons from the research

Staff within the School are currently reviewing assessment practices and many are now more prepared to modify the original Knowles-based approach to the use of learning contracts. Variations have been openly acknowledged and explained to others (including, with one course, the decision to abandon contracts entirely in the very early stages). While some reservations were expressed in the survey responses about specific aspects of contracting, there was no suggestion that a different method of assessment should be introduced. There was no desire at any level or in any group for a change of method. Criticisms of the system, such as the need for greater consistency and better orientation, are currently being followed up in an effort to improve what was generally a well-regarded practice. Ten years later the original philosophy is still shared by the staff and is, unfortunately, still regarded as radical by most other universities.

The research aimed to place current practice in perspective. As researchers we had neither the desire nor the authority to impose a new commonality. Given the difficulties involved in researching a well-established practice we were pleasantly surprised by the willingness of both staff and students to be honest and open in their responses. This, we like to think, is a reflection of an approach to adult learning which the is the cornerstone of the system.

Following the project we summarised a number of ideas regarding this type of research. The main ones are listed below.

- *Start with what is positive and can be celebrated*

A positive reference (in this case starting with the qualities of good practice) invites contributions and helps remove any perceived threat.

- *Start with the people most directly involved*

Trust depends upon a direct and open approach from the beginning. This is hard to achieve if people feel you have formed your views by talking with their critics.

- *Respect the expertise and the perspectives of those involved*

If we hope to gain their respect for the research we must demonstrate our respect for their experiences. We provided various opportunities, formal and informal, for people to contribute during the project and we used their comments to help shape it.

- *Encourage involvement and participation*

Early consultation and regular briefings allowed staff to become a part of the project. This resulted in useful additional unsolicited comments and suggestions being offered.

- *Provide feedback in a useful and convenient form*

Workshops, meetings and discussions kept staff informed of our progress and provided feedback more immediate and relevant than that which might come from a final report.

- *Work as a team*

Forming links with colleagues and being prepared to learn from others enabled a variety of perspectives to inform the research. The team reflected a variety of perspectives and roles within the School.

- *Model the values of the culture*

Cooperation can be improved by approaching the research in a way consistent with the organisational culture, for example by encouraging discussion or negotiating with others as to future directions.

- *Adopt a critical stance.*

To enable us to stand back from our work we found it important to write papers and expose our work to external groups at conferences to seek critical feedback from them. This is an important safeguard against the danger of being coopted into accepting the blinkers of an 'in-group'.

Conclusion

Researchers who set out to investigate what others regard as commonplace may face any number of obstacles. We do not pretend to have overcome all of these, nor even to have resolved all of our initial questions about the use of learning contracts. However the process of undertaking the research revealed how much is possible when a research project is built upon a high degree of participant involvement and a willingness to share ideas with others. The project enabled links with colleagues to be strengthened and issues of mutual concern to be openly discussed. It demonstrated that common assumptions are not always shared as widely as commonly supposed. It also demonstrated how research into a common practice can enrich that practice while reinforcing values that we often simply take for granted.

One of the special features of this project was that while there were differences of view between staff, these were not fundamental; the practice being examined was sufficiently robust that it was supported from a variety of ideological perspectives. In other contexts when this is not the case then the issues involved in researching a common practice become more complex and contested. However, our experience prompts us to suggest that it would be useful in such a context to start from a focus on the shared values of the competing groups rather than on the differences. If cooperation between groups is necessary for effective practice then it is necessary to plan research so that it starts and ends with what is shared no matter how divergent it becomes in between.

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Whose line is it anyway? The use of interview transcripts in researching reflective practice

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BY presenting an extended segment of an interview transcript, this paper reports one particular episode in a personal research project which asks 'how do adult educators understand the concept of "reflective practice" and make use of it in their teaching and professional development?' Specifically, I consider one aspect of researching practitioners' understandings, namely the use of interview evidence in the form of transcribed talk.

I start from two observations, both negative. First, adult education researchers have paid little if any attention to the nature of transcript evidence or to the procedures for its generation and use. This is surprising in view of the theoretical and practical importance attached to documenting and authenticating the experience of adult learners, and the value assigned to the process of generating text (e.g. in the form of a personal journal or portfolio) as a vehicle for reflection. Second, and subject to correction, I know of no extended conversations that have been published between adult educators on the subject of each other's (reflective) practice.

A transcript is both more and less than the experience it reports. There's many a slip 'twixt talk and text, and no simple prescriptions for the construction and use of transcripts. How do we get to the point where we can use interview evidence to develop our understanding of adult teaching and learning as scripting and exchange? My own experience in conducting and transcribing interviews in a variety of contexts suggests that we have a multi-layered and reflexive sequence (a) of some kind of practice, (b) interview talk about that practice, (c) the recording of that talk, (d) the textual rendition of the recording according to transcription conventions, (e) the reading of the transcript, (f) marginal commentaries on what is happening at different points in the text (g) the selection of strips of transcribed talk as evidence for some proposition, and h) their incorporation in the researcher's own exposition.

Since the transcription, reading and use of interview material is a practical accomplishment, how one is transcribing and reading is itself a question about reflective practice. Paraphrasing Stubbs (1983), Potter & Wetherell (1987) note that 'transcription is a constructive and conventional activity. The transcriber is struggling to make clear decisions about what exactly is said, and then to represent those words in a conventional orthographic system' (p. 165). Edwards & Potter (1992) propose a 'discursive action model' (DAM) to suggest ways of exploring reflective practice by examining the ways in which people talk about their practice. For them, the issue of reflexivity arises in writing their own account of other people's accounts. It is interesting to note in this connection that Schön's canonical texts on reflective practice (1983, 1987) do not themselves reflect on the above sequence, nor indeed do they refer to the procedures used for generating the transcribed teacher/student talk incorporated in these works.

A paradox for the transcriber is that dense ethnomethodological and discourse analytic renditions of talk intended to capture the nuances of an exchange are full of paraverbal markers. But they look odd, making extended scripts difficult to follow. On the other hand, 'straightforward' renditions of talk allow the discourse to flow and are easier to read, but may miss the important tacit understandings that especially characterise the verbal exchanges between those in a collegial relationship. And it is the latter which are particularly important to unpack in any investigation of reflective practice aimed at surfacing understandings. Since there is no straightforward correspondence between the text of a guided conversation and associated marginalia and what was 'actually' said, this raises important questions about the authorship (and authority) of the transcript record that the mere attribution of specific comments to individual respondents misses. There is a sense in which the resulting text both does, and does not, 'belong' to the interlocutors.

The context for the following interview extract is that it is part of a conversation which took place between myself (IB) and a colleague (JJ) as joint teachers on a Master's course entitled 'Reflective Practice'. IB introduced Rorty's notion of a 'final vocabulary'(1989) to the class; JJ explored students' written cases about a chosen practice episode in the context of Argyris' (1974) ideas about 'theories-in-use'. The selected conversation takes up our differences in approach to teaching for reflective practice. I invite you to add your own marginal notes to the transcript, to consider its construction as text and its content as evidence of thinking about reflective practice. What do you make of it?

JJ: It seems that for you, it sounds like you put language as, somehow you've brought it into the foreground where I sort of put it in the background. I've got, so the question for me is 'what do I have in the foreground?' I would have how you reason and act, I'd have the way you make meaning, I'd have counter-productive reasoning, I've lots of things in the foreground. And language in a sense is the best and only data to gain access to how you're reasoning. Now, it's funny when you say 'text', when you say 're-reading' you bring language to the front. And I'm saying 'well, yeh, but er, that's a vehicle to get ..' for me the place I want to focus my attention, which is behind the language is a way of reasoning and that's what I want to look for, so that I see the language as a vehicle er, (pause) whether I'm making, when I hear you talk I sort of, my reaction is (pause) there's too much attention being put at a place that (pause), well, there's more attention being put in some place than I would put there. I'd put my attention some place else. Er, and I guess, why am I doing that?

IB: But you also said to me the other day in relation to the work we did on Thursday that putting it in the forefront in some senses gives an additional, the additional possibilities for framing practice in a different kind of way, gives it an additional kind of dimension. Like the notion of dealing with the final vocabulary, OK. Like the notion of scripting, and the fact that we are independent agents to some extent. But we are also scripted in a sense, OK? Now I like that kind of vocabulary, and I think that partly might be a function of the way in which we've been raised as educators - you through an educational psych tradition, me through a sort of structuralist tradition if you like, I don't know.

JJ: Yeh.

IB: I think we're coming from different places as practitioners, and I wonder if we're going to different places. I don't ...

JJ: Well, that's not clear to me yet.

IB: ... know the answer to that

JJ: Er,

IB: It's not clear to you yet?

JJ: No.

IB: No?

JJ: No. See what's interesting for me that I really like your idea of final vocabulary. The reason I like it is er, it's a concept, it, er, I can tell a little story. The story is our actions are very skilled. They're automatic, in fact that's a definition of being skilled, that they come so fast I don't have to think about them much. So what I need to do when I find myself behaving in ways which are counterproductive is to try and invent some way to interrupt that. And so I need to develop heuristics which would be little rules ...

IB: Hm

JJ: ... which need to have attached to them what Heller would call a 'flag'. I need to have some little flag that can go up that gets my attention so when I see the flag, I can interrupt myself and pull in a new rule. Otherwise I'm just gonna go down the same old path I've gone down before.

IB: And you see final vocabulary ...

JJ: Final vocabulary ...

IB: ... the concept of a final vocabulary ...

JJ: ... as a flag.

IB: As a flag, OK.

JJ: So that what I need to do is I need to, now there's lots of other flags that people could have. Final vocabulary may work as a flag. Now what I want, what I wanted, what I was doing today in fact in class was saying if final vocabulary works for you as a flag, and in J–'s case there's what we've now come to call final vocabularies. My meaning behind a final vocabulary is that you state a position and you appear to be closed to anything that would influence it. So that's the meaning I put on final vocabulary. 'I'm the boss'. That's the bottom line of final vocabulary.

IB: 'These are the facts'.

JJ: The meaning for me, what I wanted to explore with the class is what is the meaning behind final vocab ... why does final vocabulary put you off, or close down discussion? What's counterproductive? Then the question is can you think of it differently, can you invent new sentences? So in some sense I don't want to analyse the text, so the words in a sense are not, the words are important. What's more important though is when I think that's a final vocabulary, I set in motion a whole set of things. So it's not a specific set of words, it's that when I hear those words I think 'final vocabulary', when I think 'final vocabulary' I believe you're not going to listen to me, when I believe you're not going to listen to me I get angry. And what comes out is, I walk away from the conversation. So that to spend a lot of time with the specific words is less important, although very important, but less important than when you see the words you think 'final vocabulary', when you think 'final vocabulary' you feel this, when you feel this then, there's a whole chain of events that I wanna, what Argyris would call ladder of inference, I wanna go up the ladder and then be able to go back down the ladder and recognize what's on the ladder and that kind of stuff. So final vocabulary for me is like a flag, it's something that people can say 'oh, oh, that's a final vocabulary' and do two things at once. They can recognize the loop they may go into that may be counterproductive and what's counterproductive about that loop, and also have a new rule to insert. When you think of something that you hear is a final vocabulary, think and say this rather than whatever your thoughts said before. So I mean that's why I like 'final vocabulary', that's a nice hook to hang things on. Do we have other hooks to hang things on? and let's find hooks to hang things on. Er, we had one the other day, I should keep a journal in my class, but we had couple of others that were really good hooks, and yet they come along rarely but they're the kind of thing that you, it's a powerful organising principle, it's a powerful mnemonic, it's a, those are, none of those are the words I mean but they're really a good concept that you can hang something one that's clear when it comes up, it's easy to recall, you can, it's a good heuristic that's what it is. And 'final vocabulary' I think works like this in this class, because of the way you've introduced it, because they've got lots of examples to connect it to, because it connects with their experience. But in essence it seems to me it also illustrates, it may illustrate the difference in our approaches. My approach is not to pay a lot of attention to the text as *text* there, but to pay attention to the meanings put on those texts.

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Practitioner-based enquiry: in-service teacher education as a research environment

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THIS paper is based on some ongoing work in three Lincolnshire schools being carried out under the auspices of Lincolnshire TVEI. The schools are very different in character: a GM mixed secondary modern school, a GM boys grammar school and a 4-19 school for physically disabled children. What they have in common, however, is a need to respond to the requirements of the national curriculum and TVEI criteria to introduce cross-curricular themes. In many senses, the report on the work is premature but the opportunity to explore it in this environment is part of my attempt to deconstruct and reconstruct the meanings of the work in progress and to engage in some public reflection. (Day, 1993)

Since the late 1980s, Lincolnshire LEA and later the central TVEI team have been collaborating with two economics education projects based at the University of Manchester, mainly through the university staff providing in-service training in curriculum development workshops for clusters of schools and some individual schools who had identified particular staff development needs or who had made specific bids for financial support under the TVEI arrangements for school development planning. While these have been generally successful in encouraging individual teachers to consider the implications of exploring economic issues within their core and foundation subjects, institutional change has been more illusory, leading Davies (1992) to conclude that in schools throughout the country:

> ... in most schools staff involvement ... was on the basis of individual goodwill. Co-ordinators (or in some cases a Deputy Head) sought out interested colleagues and nurtured their participation through informal contacts.

The outcomes in general, and particularly in the context of this paper, in Lincolnshire, were an awareness that work thus far was not having the wider impact intended and that there was no permeation into departments or schools arising from the individual contacts that had been made. The project that emerged from discussion between members of Lincolnshire TVEI central team and the writer, by this time a researcher with Economic Awareness Teacher Training (EcATT) based in the School of Education in Manchester, was one whose focus was more towards institutional change, and the deliberate gathering of evidence about this process. Like the earlier work, the project was to have an action research orientation, ('systematic enquiry made public' [Stenhouse in Gurney, 1989]), and part of the focus of concern was to reflect on the process of change as well as initiate and sustain the change in curriculum and teaching style that was both sought and anticipated. So while the context of this paper is Lincolnshire schools, economics education and the management of change, the focus of concern in the paper is the process of enquiry and the impact it had on some of the teachers involved and on the university based researcher. Both of the economics education projects based in Manchester had their origins in the work of the Economics 14-16 Project, which had been a major project with a curriculum development phase lasting from 1980 to 1986 and which was designed to take on in-service teacher training functions as part of its brief — something which gave the project some funding from the Schools Council to supplement what it received from elsewhere. This approach, in clear rejection of the prevailing "Research, Development and Dissemination", or centre-periphery model, took on a more practice-focused approach exemplifying a model of curriculum renewal that involved teachers in development, trial, review and dissemination stages, often described as a periphery-periphery model. This continued within both Economic and Industrial Awareness Programme (EIAP) and EcATT and was the development strategy which informed their work with schools which by 1990 were having to make curricular provision for economics education under the requirements of the 1988 Education Act and the various statutory orders and non- statutory guidance that had emerged from the National Curriculum Council. This latter issue is in itself problematic, given that school-based curriculum development is conventionally thought of as being a mechanism through which teachers' professionalism is validated, while the national curriculum has been described as a process of proletarianisation. Contrast this:

> the idea of teachers as curriculum developers topples the traditional hierarchical order of teachers located at the bottom of the professional pyramid, with the two upper strata occupied by curriculum developers and researchers. ... The

> focus of control over what counts as valid educational knowledge is thus shifted from external agencies to the schools themselves (Keiny 1993)

with the demands that are made on teachers through the statutory requirements made in national curriculum documents. It is this contradiction that is, I believe, the origin of the paradigmatic uncertainty within which this research, and other national curriculum related developments, is located. This, perhaps, needs to be examined more closely.

Keiny *(ibid)*, quoting Skilbeck, argues that school-based curriculum development is guided by three principles:

- increase [in] autonomy of the school as an institution;
- a curriculum that meets the specific needs of the particular school populations, to be generated by teachers (ie, the school's internal 'pool of resources'); and
- enhancing motivation and transferring responsibility to teachers by involving them in the process of integrating their teaching experiences into a curricular unit.

In marked contrast, an (admittedly hostile) review of Curriculum Guidance 4: Educating for Economic and Industrial Awareness, commented:

> Curriculum Guidance 4 offers a pretty convincing impersonation of a subject: delineation of knowledge content, identification of key concepts, suggested topic approaches for teaching. (Mackenzie 1990)

On the one hand, the model of development is intended to be humane and empowering, and on the other, it is expected to subscribe to, and produce approaches and outcomes which meet pre-determined requirements and which are located outside of the school. The task of the research activity, then is to strive to overcome this paradox through a process which perhaps inevitably, undermines one of the positions described.

The role of the outsider in action research has been rehearsed in a wide variety of places and the general conclusion would seem to be that in partnership, outsiders and practitioners could collaborate to produce the desired outcomes, subject to certain conditions: and that reflection on the process was as important as reflection on the direction of the activity and the nature of the outcomes themselves. The contrast seems to be between the action research which uses practitioners as data gatherers within parameters set by academic researchers and that which sees practitioners as full participants in determining the nature and the extent of the enquiry.

The model of practice which had grown up with both EIAP and EcATT was one described as 'plan-teach-review' and which encouraged teachers to draw on their professional expertise as subject teachers, and to explore the nature and extent of their uncertainties in regard to new knowledge brought to them by the external agent. In responding to the uncertainties, the teachers then explore the potential within their existing curriculum, for enhanced effectiveness (plan). They then try out the enhanced model in their own classrooms (teach) and, using the opportunities for collaboration with colleagues from their own or other schools, they explore the events, the materials and the learning (review). These uncertainties are, for Schon, key features of the process. As he writes:

> [they are] the potential basis for enhanced effectiveness. They constitute a positive and inevitable facet of classroom life wherein teachers who recognise them as such are able to accept the challenge of implementing new strategies whilst simultaneously acknowledging and assimilating revised pedagogies. Enhanced practice is founded on perceived wisdom, not accounted deficiencies. (Broadhead, 1989)

Plan-teach-review mirrors that process described by Carr and Kemmis (1986) *(ibid)* as 'planning, acting, observing and reflecting' and while it could be argued that the planning in the project as a whole did not start within each institution, the decision to participate in the project did, as did the executive planning in the context of components of the school's curriculum. The extent to which the external planning compromises the process as a whole depends on its perceived remoteness from the school: decisions had been made by Lincolnshire TVEI to offer this provision to schools; more nationally, either economics education could be seen as a desirable outcome of the educational process (something which had been engaging economists and economics educators since the mid 1950s) or as something which was being imposed by parliament and an unsympathetic state curriculum body. Either way, the external researcher was not imposing a personal research agenda, rather exploring ways in which insiders could respond to the potential within their own subjects for addressing wider concerns.

The teachers in the schools directly involved in this project had different levels of awareness of these and related issues. For some, there was an acknowledgment of the value of incorporating cross-curricular themes; for others there was a recognition that their responsibility (for historical or situational reasons) could be eased by involvement in the project; for others there was a commitment to aspects of the approach and a genuine desire to see the entitlement extended to all pupils. As summed up by one of the coordinators: "in the earliest days of TVEI we were baffled, bewildered and slightly hostile to the themes. Courses had not been particularly informative but rather simplistic and pie-in-the-sky. Many of my colleagues regarded the themes as mickey-mouse". Another co-ordinator spoke of her initial sense of relief that support was to be given to her to enable her to 'fill the role' for which she was being paid, within a structure where a senior member of staff had set the school objectives which in turn had been transmitted and agreed by the county TVEI management under the bid and contract arrangements. The co-ordinator in another school, used as a pilot opportunity to explore aspects of the initial data gathering phase, saw the project as a way in which his work would be done for him: that the outcome of what was described, wrongly, I think, as an audit, would absolve him of further responsibility under the bid and contract arrangements made with TVEI management.

Expectations for the project, then, were mixed but the extent to which individuals involved had been engaging in reflection on their practice was limited to what was possible in the time available, viz perhaps meeting three of the five levels in Griffiths and Tann's model of reflective practice: 'rapid reaction, repair, review' (Day). What was lacking, perhaps, in the earliest days, was the later levels: research, reformulation; or more importantly, a clarity of purpose of the reflection. In his article 'Reflection: a necessary but not sufficient condition for professional development', Christopher Day subscribes to a more critical interpretation and use to which reflection might be employed, describing it as a form of political action which has institutional as well as individual outcomes and one in which, as he quotes Kemmis:

> It is a practice which expresses our power to reconstitute social life by the way we participate in communication, decision-making and social action *(ibid).*

If this is a dimension which is to be achieved in this project, it still has some way to go. What has been achieved is a degree of independence for the school-based co-ordinators in that they have been encouraged to maintain autonomy over the early stages of their developments — sometimes to their personal discomfort. For in attempting to avoid a situation where answers are there for the taking, I have strived to create one in which the co-ordinators are looking beyond their immediate practices to the wider political significance, for unless:

> ... reflective teaching requires that public theories are translated into personal ones and vice versa ... teachers are going to allow themselves to be turned into low level operatives, content with carrying out their tasks more and more efficiently, while remaining blind to the large issues of the underlying purposes and results of schooling *(ibid).*

If the project is to succeed in doing this, it is the more authoritarian positions adopted within the implementation of the Educational Reform Act that will be undermined.

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Practitioner research as continuing self-education

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Introduction

BOTH the positivist and naturalist traditions have stressed the need for an objectivity that implies a distinction between the researcher and the researched. This distinction denies the importance of the subjective experience of the researcher except as an embarrassment to be overcome. The unique ontological position of the researcher is considered a hindrance in the search for replicability upon which scientific respectability depends. These concerns are now giving way — particularly, though not exclusively, in naturalist research — to the pursuit of understanding rather than proof. Within qualitative research, the subjective experience of researchers is becoming valued as data. The practitioner-researcher is understood to have access not simply to internal records, but to understandings drawn from personal reflection. The distinction between researcher and researched is conflated as the subject and object of the research become one.

Practitioner researchers engage with their 'lived experience' (Manen 1990) in structured and responsible ways in order to gain a deeper understanding of professional problems. This understanding is fed back into their practice. Within this strategy of action research, skills of reflection are developed which allow people to develop more fully as human beings: practitioner research becomes a form of continuing self-education. Continuing adult educators are concerned with these issues: both as teachers developing learning environments in which greater responsibility is placed upon the learners through such approaches as distance learning and accredited prior experiential learning (APEL); and as practitioner researchers reflecting on their own practice at a time of change.

The Role of the Reflective Practitioner

Practitioner research places the practitioner at the centre of the research context with the question: 'What is it I am actually doing?' (Devereux 1967:7). We may imagine the research arena as a vast space of competing ideologies ready to colonise our research endeavour with epistemologies developed for other purposes, and we must have the confidence to pitch our tents in our own space and to find ways of speaking our own problem in our own way. We should follow the rules of the arena by being systematic and by exposing our work to public gaze but, because our goals are 'I/thou' centred rather than 'you/they' centred (Hampton 1993), both the process and the product may have to be constantly restated by individual practitioners. There will always be different starting points when approaching both a practitioner research problem and its solution: different starting points in terms of personal background, experience, and the nature of the problem.

Systematic strategies for reflection through the use of diaries, methodological 'logs', and supportive peer groups are central to the unique research process of practitioners. The practitioner-researcher is combining two roles to the ultimate benefit of both, but the benefits do not exclude the potential for role conflict inherent in the marriage of two occupied concepts: 'practitioner' and 'researcher' (Hampton 1988:10). Both concepts have an overt power status linked to them which should inform our reflective activity from the outset. For example, our professional position may empower us to define the health or educational needs of other groups; when we add a research dimension to that established position, we may approach participants in a research role, but be received by them in a practitioner role. Alternatively, participants who are familiar with the term 'researcher' and its power connotations may approach us as researchers rather than colleagues.

The space between the two positions of practitioner and researcher is reduced by reflecting on the value implications of what we propose to do. The practitioner-researcher will reflect upon the extent to which s/he is working *with* or *on* the researched. Such reflection should lead to a research methodology consistent with the stance of a practitioner who continues to be within and of the research site. The practical and ethical need to work with, rather than on, those who agree to co-operate with us in research presents a challenge. Neither the practitioner-researcher nor the participants can anticipate the outcome of a research process which may have various implications for participants (Hampton 1992:175). Living the experience should imply that validation procedures are located within an ethical framework. Part of that framework will have implications for adult educators who should be experienced in communicating complex ideas in plain language. Research reports written in traditional 'didactic deadpan' (Watkins 1963) are ill-suited for a discussion of reflective learning, or for communicating the increased understanding of a professional problem to busy colleagues or other participants: 'Rather, the process of writing and rewriting ... is more reminiscent of the artistic activity of creating an art object ... that often reflects the personal 'signature' of the author' (Manen 1990:131-2). We can draw on literature, relationships, music, gardening, childhood, anything that helps to deepen our understanding and make creative connections around our professional problem.

Reflection as self-education

Writing and re-writing, often in the form of a first-person account, is the manner in which reflective practitioners can hold a mirror to their growing understanding (Manen 1990:124-133). Structured encounters with participants in research generate a wide range of perspectives around a common theme. Whatever the tone of those encounters: hostile, suspicious, negative, or evasive, we are encountering other ways of making meaning which will help to capture our 'fringe thoughts' (Mills 1970:216) and enable us to break through our 'taken-as-given' ways of thinking. A personal notebook for jottings of impressions following such encounters helps to 'fix' the data in our minds; it also gives us insights into how, at that stage in the process, *we* are making connections (Holly 1989:76). The writing process allows us to meditate on the action we have just left: perhaps we are angry at what we considered were outrageous views; perhaps our participant was unaware of the importance of what s/he contributed; perhaps another participant has been indiscreet and burdened us with information we are not able to share as a *researcher*, but which, as a practitioner, we could have shared with a colleague. The act of writing allows us to look at how we think: to ask the question, 'How do we know what we think we know?' (Sidell 1989). Of the many answers to that question, one may be that earlier *personal* experiences are affecting how we are listening to other people. That knowledge enables us to suspend such interferences in future while we continue our research. In addition to private notebooks, other records such as research logs or diaries enable practitioners to make connections with other experiential ways of knowing.

If we feel we have experienced a stigmatised identity emanating from skin colour, gender, poverty, or disability, then the act of writing becomes a protection against the loneliness and stress of our developing self-knowledge. The diary and methodological log of one of the present authors, for example, helped her to identify the extent to which early childhood experiences were affecting how she listened to participants; and, during the early part of the research process, to realise how her professional anti-racist discourse was leading her to label some participants as 'racist' even before she had analysed what they had said! (Hampton 1993). The daily process of jottings, analytical memos, and diagrams is further enriched as we use the data to think with as we read the relevant literature, or listen to a lecture, or take part in discussion with a peer group.

Reflection as self-education as a goal for adult education courses cannot be tacked on as an interesting requirement by tutors for students who are also busy practitioners; it demands a specific learning/teaching environment which starts in the experience of the students rather than external structures. Such strategies for fostering reflective practice can challenge the structural organisation of departments of adult continuing education, particularly when the ethos enables practitioner-students to co-operate in learning tasks that enter the assessment process.

The reflective group

Any researcher can benefit from the comments of a 'critical friend': but such benefits become qualitatively different when a group of practitioners reflect upon their own experience. Thus Coleman (1991) and her colleagues explored 'the question: in what way do women experience their organisations' (p1). Her monograph has its origins in a dissertation for a Masters Degree during which she reflected on both the research question and the research process with the co-operation of a group of women. Neither Coleman nor any other member of the group was either 'subject' or 'object': they were co-operatively researching lived experience. This co-operation in the research for the dissertation caused some discussion among the examiners, but any doubts about the project were removed by the brilliance of its execution. If such projects are to become more commonplace, as surely they should on post-graduate degrees intended for experienced practitioners, then examination methods will need to be reconsidered.

Less contentious are groups of post-graduate students which provide peer support. For example, one group of MEd students in Sheffield met regularly without their tutor, first to develop each of their dissertation proposals and subsequently to review progress throughout the year. These groups can enhance the performance of each participant through a process of interactive reflection (cf. Reason 1988a).

The interaction between lived experience and scholarship or research forms part of the tradition of university departments of adult continuing education. These departments have been prominent in the development of such subjects as trade union studies, local and labour history, and women's studies. In such subjects the distinction between 'tutor' and 'student' often becomes blurred as experiences or life histories interact with theoretical exposition and the development of the syllabus. There is also a growing tendency to involve adult students at every stage in the evaluation of courses. This evaluation is itself a time for reflection on the learning process.

From the research perspective, the potential for developing co-operative inquiry groups in departments of adult continuing education is considerable. Reason (1988b) discusses such groups in terms familiar to adult educators who negotiate their curriculum: 'people ... discuss the project, have some influence on its design ... [but] co-operative inquiry is not an unstructured process ... [it] involves a rigorous iteration between action in the world and reflection' (pp 23 and 26). The topics researched by groups can range widely over the popular subjects taught in adult continuing education. The method can, however, have a particular significance for people who come together as practitioners to research their own practice, as teachers, nurses or managers for example. Adult tutors should realise the potential, also, for forming their own staff groups to reflect upon their practice. Here is a basis for the research into adult education that is often lacking in busy teaching departments.

Conclusion

The concept of reflective practitioner-researcher offers a shared methodology for tutors, post-graduate professionals and general course students. The blurring of divisions between tutor and student referred to earlier is completed as reflection becomes 'a social process, not a purely individual process' (Kemmis 1985:143). The values underpinning this social process, for example, co-operation, openness, responsibility, tolerance of ambiguity, and the valuing of self and others, create the conditions that enable practitioners 'to develop their *reflexive powers*, ie their capacities to monitor the self-in-action and to direct its future development in the professional context' (Elliott 1989:97). The strategies to achieve this goal: diaries, journals, first-person accounts, co-operative peer support groups, and 'critical friends', ensure that we keep our inner worlds awake (Mills 1970:217) and arrive at a deeper understanding of how we live in the world. Practitioner-research as continuing self-education allows adult educators to develop a distinctive form of research entirely congruent with their own, and their students, needs and strengths.

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Practitioners as researchers — or is it evaluators? And does it matter?

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THIS paper discusses issues surrounding particular routes towards the professional development of practitioners in Adult Continuing Education and Training (ACET). This assumes some understanding of what it means to be a professional, and while this is not central to my concerns here, a brief comment is necessary. My own view for some time has been that professionalism is the practice and continuing development of expertise and that to be 'professional' requires continuing to learn about the field in which one practices.

> There is a continuing active interest in enquiring into the bases of practice and a continuing effort to develop the efficacy of that practice. A professional is someone alive to the key issues in their area, actively concerned with perhaps a sub-set of the whole rather than everything at once (Thorpe, 1988a).

Professions, such as medicine or law, emphasise the application of a body of knowledge based in the sciences. Carr and Kemmis, discussing these issues in relation to teaching in schools, outline three features characteristic of a profession: the use of techniques and skills supported by a body of systematically produced knowledge, primary commitment to the well being of clients, and professional autonomy — 'the right to make autonomous judgements free from external non-professional controls and constraints (Carr and Kemmis,1986). If we place emphasis however on the continuous development of knowledge through professional practice, as Schön and others have done, then the ability to learn from practice takes centre stage. In the case of practitioners in ACET, the component practices of various kinds of evaluation and research can play a productive role in this, and I have myself written and tutored courses oriented towards the professional development of practitioners, which require data collection of one kind or another. I believe it is important to clarify the expected outcomes from coursework of this kind, both for the student, who should be clear about what skills are to be developed, and for the assessor, who needs very clearly specified criteria against which to make judgements.

In the last five years, I have tutored and examined Open University students completing two project-based courses, one at diploma level, the other at MA level, both therefore counting towards postgraduate qualifications in the School of Education. Students are usually practitioners in some area of provision for adult training or education or guidance. Although both courses may lead the student to engage in activities normally associated with research — primarily interviews and questionnaires — their orientation and criteria for assessment have important differences.

I shall argue that some of these differences relate to the distinctions that can be made between evaluation and research, and that they might therefore have a significance wider than my own immediate concerns as a course author and tutor. The desirability that teachers should do research has been well developed in the sphere of schooling, and at least some of the arguments also apply to teaching in post-compulsory and adult continuing education and training (ACET). But if we are going to require that professional competence should incorporate abilities in this area, it is important to clarify whether the model is closer to that of evaluation rather than conventional academic research. Since the differences between these two are often disputed, it may be preferable to avoid the terminology of 'evaluation versus research' and to attempt instead to specify what aspects of professional competence are the desired outcomes of project based and research based course work. Without such clarity, there is a risk of students misunderstanding the criteria against which they will be assessed. There is also a risk that some students' work will be judged against inappropriate criteria.

Before I attempt to justify the position I am putting forward here, an account is required of the student experience in the postgraduate courses I tutored. First, the half credit project course E860 (approximately 250 hours study) completes the Diploma in Post Compulsory Education. Most students completed this as the last of four half credit courses covering areas of adult learning, open learning, programme design, issues in policy administration and management, and special needs. The student's task is to design and carry out a project assessed on the basis of the methods used, the analysis of data, use of relevant literature and presentation of findings. The Project Guide notes :

> The assessment procedure centres around your

> professional competence to analyse a problem, draw conclusions and make appropriate recommendations based on the evidence. (Dissertation Module, E816)

The MA module (c. 450 hours study) by contrast adopts a classical research paradigm of theoretical analysis as the basis for choice of research question, sophisticated grasp of methodological issues and rigorous presentation and analysis of findings. The candidate's dissertation is assessed according to criteria which include the following:

> - clearly specify a research question;
> - include a sustained, sound, and coherent academic treatment of the topic approved for the dissertation;
> - demonstrate an adequate level of competence in the research methods appropriate to the dissertation, provide a reflexive account of the methodology used and make clear the relationship between the starting point and the eventual outcome of the dissertation
> - demonstrate adequate knowledge and critical perception of relevant literature in the field *(Ibid.)*.

Students are advised that they must see themselves from the beginning as writing for an academic audience, and the distinction between professional and academic is underlined. Although the topic chosen may relate to issues of professional relevance to themselves and their colleagues, the requirements they are to fulfil (identification of clear research questions, defence of research methods, and so on) relate primarily to academic research criteria. Thus, whereas students on the diploma project course are encouraged to formulate a set of professional recommendations arising from their study, MA module candidates are told to compile any professional recommendations only after they have completed their dissertation. These recommendations are in any case largely irrelevant to the criteria determining pass or failure on the MA.

My experience of students in the ACET field is that they find the strictures of both these courses demanding, and that those of the MA module are marginally more difficult to meet than those of the diploma, primarily because of the academic rather than professional audience rubric in the criteria for assessment of the MA. Perhaps this would also be true of candidates whose direct experience is as school based practitioner.s However ACET students often have an additional difficulty which is that they are interested in topics where there is not already a large and established literature to which they can refer. Thus it is difficult for them to demonstrate how their research questions arise from and relate to, more general theoretical concerns where other findings, concepts and theories are available for discussion. This position also arises from the fact that most teachers of adults have not had an extended initial training or periods of study of relevant theoretical and research based literature.

Separately from these practical difficulties is the issue of underlying distinction between what is required of Diploma students versus what is required of MA students: professional rigour versus academic rigour. I think a case can be made for both, and one which does not conclude that one is intrinsically 'higher' or more advanced than the other. Issues of status should, I think, reflect the extent of expertise of the individual in either professional or academic rigour, and the requirements of context, rather than the expertise itself. There are distinctions to be made, for example, about the appropriateness of expertise in one rather than the other in relation to the requirements of different contexts and practitioner roles, but that is not to argue that one must always take precedence over the other.

So what do students find difficult about the Diploma project course? This course draws upon two literatures directly: practitioner as researcher and action research. Both these areas overlap with the literature on educational evaluation and share the emphasis on context and problem as driving the issues for research and to some extent, methodology used. Problem analysis and organisation analysis are also central, given the very close relationship between research and practice which is at the heart of this group of literatures and practices. These are also literatures and practices which have grown up out of critiques of the conventional research paradigm as weak in relation to effects on practice and as a means of bringing about desired change (Nisbet and Broadfoot, 1980, Ashton et al, 1983). Students of the Diploma project course are practitioners who start from the perspective of their own practice as the basis for their project and any data collection and analysis which it may involve. They characteristically find that, of the requirements arising from the course, these are the most challenging:

- formulating specific questions to which their study will provide answers, however provisional, rather than reiterating the issues they perceive in their context generally
- retaining focus on the questions chosen and not being distracted by new events and the morass of detail which threatens to overwhelm them
- communicating in writing so that a professional not based in their immediate context can grasp their problem issue and the findings presented *sufficiently to be able to review its relevance to their own immediate professional context*

These challenges are of course additional to the perennial and general problems all students face in pacing their work and fitting it in to already overcrowded lives.

Therefore if this course is successful in developing professional rigour, it means that students have learned something about problem and context analysis, skill in written communication, and a degree of confidence and personal persistence in tackling a limited problem rather than distraction across all available problems in their area. They may also learn something about data collection and analysis skills, whether postal survey, interviews, observation or a combination of methods are used. Although these methods tend to dominate the students' perception of what they have to learn I suggest they are secondary to the first set of professional skills.

In contrast, students pursuing the academic rigour model of the MA Module have, in my experience, to learn these things:

- That immedate professional issues have to be articulated with available discourses and fields of knowledge and research, in order to make a contribution. In other words, we have to speak a shared language, even if our contribution is very specialised or a minority concern in the larger whole.
- Methodology is different from listing the methods used. We have to give some time to issues about how knowledge is legitimately accumulated and our own responsibility to be self critical and aware as the person collecting data and interpreting it.
- Other researchers and colleagues have a right to read about what the findings were, separately from our own interpretation of their meanings and the conclusions to which they give rise.

As I implied earlier, what seems like the greater difficulty practitioners/students experience in meeting these learning needs may reflect the fact that the requirement to be conversant with an existing body of literature is not part of the experience of most practitioners, whereas being conversant with a set of professional issues, even a policy making context, is much more likely. However there may also be areas which could be said to be intrinsically difficult; methodology, for instance, is often an area where students find it very difficult to see what the issues are about and why they might matter so much.

The first question of my title asks whether the model of practitioner as researcher would be more appropriately titled practitioner as evaluator, and the second asks whether this matters; are we not splitting hairs? Obviously it did matter for my students since the criteria for success hinged in part on the distinctions between the two. For example, if a candidate for the MA failed to show awareness of any conceptual link between their research questions and those of an existing literature, there would be grounds for resubmission, possibly even outright failure. I believe it matters in a more general sense however, in that I would want to argue that professional development should certainly encompass the idea of professional rigour, but could see as much more optional, the development of academic (in the sense of the conventional research paradigm outlined) rigour.

If we were to accept this, it has implications for those designing courses for practitioners, where we need to be clear whether the desired outcomes of coursework fall within approaches more typical of evaluation or research, or indeed whether the primary concern is professional competence/development. One aspect of being a professional for example, ought to be an understanding of evaluation and at least some ability to carry out self evaluation as a teacher, but not necessarily academic research. I realise, of course, that research and evaluation overlap, and that a core set of skills could be said to underly both. But there are important distinctions, and arguably the most important is that the evaluator takes as given a particular context and its learning forms and derives issues from these — perhaps even has to work with issues already formulated by those directly involved. The researcher by contrast takes direct responsibility for the formulation of issues, taking into account a wide range of contexts and learning forms, and the findings of other relevant studies. For the researcher, understanding the significance of the immediate context may be one of the outcomes of research rather than the starting point for it.

I see there being a strong case for including familiarity with the requirements and procedures of evaluation in the definition of the core role of a practitioner in ACET (see Thorpe 1988b for the application of the case to open and distance learning). More in-depth understanding, perhaps even the development of skills in carrying out evaluation, might be seen as part of staff development and, in the context of this paper, professional development. Professionalism as the development of formal qualification structures which set practitioners further apart from their learners or students, is not always a process with desirable results for the learners. But to be professional can also be seen more positively, as incorporating ideas of self critique and awareness — the ability to learn through practice — which is at the heart of Schön's reflective practitioner model. The adoption of this model, and of the general idea of learning from practice, does not have to take the form of adopting the paradigms of academic research. Practitioners have much to learn in this area, even without taking on the goals of theoretically based research questions and sophisticated methodology which are the hallmarks of the academic researcher.

Schön's ideas grew out of a critique of the technical rationality model, where the professional is defined as one essentially applying a knowledge base developed during prior academic study. If this can be seen as flawed in the case of medicine, architecture, engineering and the rest, how much more so in the case of adult learning? What we do know about how people learn tells us that large areas of learner response is unpredictable. Squires' contingency model of learning expresses this well, in asserting that what and how we teach is contingent on who is learning and what is to be learned. Add to this the variable of context, that where we learn, be it workplace, home or academic institution, also affects the process, and there is a very strong case for structuring the responsive stance of the practitioner, through regular evaluative activities. However effective our pre-course investigations, it is impossible to predict the detailed response of learners and therefore necessary to have some means of checking that out in a reasonably systematic way.

Given the diversity of practitioner roles in ACET, not all will have direct links with a particular course, but the case for the role of evaluation and research in professional competence can also be made in relation to guidance, organising and policy making activities (Thorpe, 1992, Edwards and Thorpe 1992). This does not mean that practitioners should necessarily become experts in questionnaire design or other techniques. It does mean that they should be able to stand outside their own context and describe it, both orally and in writing, in a fashion which clarifies the issues embedded within it, and enables the 'outsider'(whether external colleague or a tutor) to grasp its general significance. This may seem like a basic skill but it is certainly one which, in my experience, practitioners do not necessarily possess to the degree they require for their own professional development.

Involvement in either evaluation or research also means that practitioners need to be able to work within a defined focus for a sustained period of time, in order to pursue a planned study. That requires the development of personal qualities such as persistence, and confidence in the value of one's own insights. However, it also requires that working conditions allow some control of time and energies, and we are all aware of the constraints under which many practitioners in ACET work, constraints which make it extremely difficult to develop the elements of professional and academic rigour which are being discussed here. There are occasions, however, when the implementation of some 'research' or 'evaluation' project is the only way of legitimising time away from the immediate demands of provision and of finding the time to reflect on, and therefore to learn from, the practice in which one is engaged.

Notwithstanding the many difficulties that current working conditions for ACET practitioners may create, the diverse models of both evaluation and of research offer valuable and distinctive routes towards personal and professional development. The distinctions do matter in the case of assessed course work, where work which might not meet academic research criteria can be productive in the development of professional rigour and assessed appropriately. The implication is that practitioners do not have to become bona fide academic researchers in order to develop professionally, whereas they might be required (as one element in being an effective practitioner) to be able to interpret and possibly to use the findings of evaluation and research, and to be able to undertake at least some forms of self evaluation. It seems to me that this is a necessary if not sufficient condition not only for well founded practitioner development, but for what has been referred to as 'the notion of a conversational educational research community' (Hustler 1991).

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Adult educators' reflections on M.Ed. projects which they had undertaken

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Aims of the study

THE theory of curriculum development tells us that we should evaluate our courses (Henderson 1978). If we took a systematic approach to this we should assess our students before the course and then again after the course to examine what and how much development had taken place (e.g. Watson 1975, Potter 1980). We rarely do this systematically for practical reasons.

However I wanted to look at some aspect of evaluation with our M Ed course for Adult Educators which has now been running for ten years. While the taught components have changed substantially over these years, the Research Study has remained basically unchanged, so I decided to examine that.

Another idea that is behind this project is that we try to develop in both our students and ourselves the ability to work as reflective practitioners (Schön 1987). Part of this entails that when we have completed something we ought not just to rush on to the next task which confronts us but we ought to stop, reflect on and evaluate what we have done and what we can learn from it.

A project to evaluate an educational course could approach the course from several angles but in view of the last point I wanted primarily to obtain from the participants of the current study reflections upon their experiences.

Background: the course

To put the study into context, an outline of the course will be useful. Typically three-quarters of it consists of taught strands, the other quarter being a research project, although a student may opt to do half the course as taught components and the other half, rarely, as a larger research project.

The taught component originally consisted of a series of year-long options. However from October 1988 the course changed and students now chose six term-long modules. This gives them an opportunity to study a wider range of subject matter, but usually in rather less depth. By coincidence, roughly half of the students in the study took the course under the old format and the rest have studied under the present format.

The adult education modules are a small number in a very large number of modules provided across the Faculty of Education, most of which are aimed at school teachers. Adult education students are at liberty to take some of these other modules, though traditionally they tended not to, with exceptions I shall mention below.

Adult education modules are provided by a small group of tutors who tend to provide courses on general topics, such as the history of, or policy of adult education etc, rather than, for instance, courses on teaching specific subjects such as science or music. Occasionally students have opted to study a school-focused classroom module, such as language teaching or to study the research methods module provided primarily for the schoolteacher students.

For the majority of the ten years we have provided an optional non-assessed series of seminars for adult education students. These have included seminars on research methods and also presentation of research projects. However most adult education students are not formally taught research methods.

The student usually takes some taught components, then chooses a research topic and is allocated a member of staff to supervise the research study. Students may be local authority tutors or FE lecturers but equally they may be vicars, trainer-tutors from the armed forces, police, or paramedical professions. We also have a few students from overseas, mainly Chinese. The vast majority are part-time students.

Method

The nature of the project, involving 80-plus students, with limited time and resources, indicated the use of a questionnaire. Considering the usual balance between a long detailed questionnaire which might provide a lot of information but a poor response rate, and a brief questionnaire which restricts the information returned but might produce a better rate of return, I chose the latter.

After piloting, the questionnaire was sent with a stamped addressed envelope to all the students. It could be returned anonymously or otherwise. A summary of findings was offered to any respondent who wanted one. In a few cases the questionnaire was followed up with an open-ended interview.

Questions and expectations

Often in research a survey of the literature leads to questions and a set of hypotheses. Here, with limited background literature I shall just indicate how I got to the questions, and rather than hypotheses, I shall merely note a few possible outcomes.

I am interested in what motivates professionals to undertake continuing education (e.g. Watson 1992) and considered that here, concerning these research projects, motivation would be evenly split between interest and vocational utility. As this survey is conducted by a tutor (ie. me) not an outside researcher, the results might be contaminated — for instance a person might out of politeness mention one of my courses as being useful. We know that supervision varies (Youngman 1989). I expected very mixed views about supervision.

Returning to my opening remarks about reflective practitioners, questions I try repeatedly to get students to consider, near the end of a study, are what difficulties did you have? and how would you improve your study if you did it again? Responses to these would be, for me, some of the most interesting comments. I consider that a lot of useful work is done in M Ed studies, but that unfortunately not enough is done to disseminate it. Finally I expected that a person's future research would be related (in content or method) to their M.Ed. research.

Results: responses to the questions

Q. 1: What influences a person in choice of research topic?

As this M Ed is being taken by people who are working, one would expect that a majority would be motivated to do something related to their work. In fact over 50% said they were equally motivated by both interest and usefulness for work. Only a few mentioned use for work by itself. About a third said they were motivated mainly by interest.

Q. 2. What courses most influenced the choice of studies?

The courses cited as most influencing the studies, by a large margin, were Psychology and Continuing Education for the Professions. The only others mentioned more than twice were Philosophy and our introductory overview course, Policy and Practice. As I teach psychology and CEP, there is possible reason, as mentioned earlier, to be cautious about this result. On the other hand as the majority of students had indicated they wanted to do something related to their work, these two courses are among those most easily applicable.

Q. 3. Having chosen a topic, what were students' views about their preparation for their study?

A sizeable minority suggested that courses on methodology, statistics and/or computing would have been beneficial. While some said the supervision they had was good, some said their's could have been more challenging; as one student said, 'less chat and more rigorous stuff'. A couple were quite critical.

Q. 4. Getting into the study, what were the main difficulties encountered?

Considering the normal steps taken in any research project, there will be for each step, a student who finds that step difficult. However the theme that came up most frequently was the limited time available. Another difficulty which came up in different forms was that the student had ended up with more data than was usable, with the resultant problem of how to handle it. On a different tack, a problem noted several times was a feeling of isolation. This is when the student, who previously has got into the student group/support atmosphere of a taught class, suddenly finds him/herself without this support.

Q. 5. What would they do about these problems if they were to rerun the study?

Obviously the ideas of taking a longer time, starting earlier, etc., came up. Also there were suggestions to focus on one issue, or a narrower subject. Of course, there were conflicting ideas. One said 'I wouldn't use a questionnaire again but would have more interviews', while another suggested cutting down on interviews and using a questionnaire instead. When asked how they would improve their study a few said they would choose an entirely different topic.

Q. 6. What was the feedback to their subjects?

About half said the question did not apply to their study. This is interesting, giving an indication of what proportion of the studies was of each type. There was no significant change in rate over the decade.

Q. 7: Students were asked whether their findings were disseminated.

I should first note that at Leeds, as at many places, a copy of the research study report is kept in the departmental library, and so, in that limited sense, the findings are available. However otherwise most respondents said they had either given a formal verbal presentation of their study at college or workplace or had presented a written report to their Management or lodged a copy of their report, for example, in their college library. Very few said they had presented their findings at a conference and in even less cases had the work led to a publication.

Q. 8: What consequences did participants see their studies as having?

Before considering the replies to this, I must remark that the question, as asked, is a leading question. However, to the question as asked, about a third said their study had no consequences. There was an overlap between these people who said the project had no consequences and those who said they were motivated mainly by interest in answer to question 1. Respondents who did note some consequences can be sorted broadly into those who noted consequences for themselves as individual teachers, and those who indicated wider-ranging consequences. From the first group, we find the study might alter a person's teaching — for example a teacher's attitude to students — or the study findings might enrich the content of a syllabus. In a few cases the teacher did a detailed content analysis of a syllabus of a training course, getting for example responses from practitioners concerning the value of specific items, and this led to syllabus changes. Some people reported that their experiences provided a model when they later were supervising their own students. More generally some studies were reported as leading to student self-development, e.g. in terms of confidence or increasing the person's self-awareness.

Among the other group, there were consequences wider than the students' immediate work: for example a study might be influential in institutional policy changes, or lead to a regional or nationally adopted scheme, or, for example, a study of student motivation led to recruitment changes and increase in institutional student numbers. Three respondents noted that following their M Ed they changed jobs. While one indicated that this was influenced by the subject of the research-study, the extent to which the study and degree were influential in the other two cases is unclear.

Q. 9: Did students follow up their work with further research?

Concerning question 9 about later research, we must recall that for some, the M.Ed. may include their first experience of research and obviously it is interesting and important to see whether this is followed up by later research. In answer to this question about a half said they had not undertaken any further research, although a few indicated they were intending to. Of the rest who had undertaken further research, the vast majority reported some similarity in their new research and that of their M Ed study.

Q. 10: The final question gave participants the opportunity to make other comments about their research study.

An oft-repeated comment was that while the study was arduous, the person enjoyed it; indeed, one said it was the best part of the course. Others said it was a very valuable learning experience. On the other hand a few students said they were disappointed in the little they had achieved in their project and again there were a couple of further criticisms of supervision received. Finally a person considered, now in hindsight, that the research-study findings were publishable, but commented that this had not been suggested.

Brief comments

The research study is generally seen as a useful and enjoyable exercise. While some supervision is good, some could be improved. We should all, for example, encourage any student who appears to be doing otherwise to restrict the study to a manageable size. A methodology course ought be available. We should encourage some students to present their work at conferences or publish it. It would be useful if SCUTREA published each year, say in *Scoop*, a list of titles of M Eds completed that year and available for consultation in the various Universities. Further results are noted and a wider range of implications is discussed at the conference.

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5. External relations and accountability

Introduction by Janice Malcolm, University of Leeds

THE papers in this section represent attempts to explore, from a number of different perspectives, the relationship between research activity and the wider context in which it takes place and is utilised. This involves examining both the constraints exercised from outside upon the processes and products of research, and the effects that research can or should have beyond the production and small-scale consumption of academic papers.

Several of the papers focus on the actual and potential political pitfalls of the research process. Paul Armstrong and Kirit Patel each provide rather painful accounts of the difficulties involved in commissioned research, where attempts may be made to 'buy' particular findings or to persuade the researcher to select only those findings which fit the sponsors' purpose. Armstrong places the researcher's dilemma in the context of the 'supplier-customer' relationship which is increasingly being imposed upon educational transactions, and questions the extent to which researchers should accept the dictum that 'the customer is always right' — clearly a question that also merits further discussion beyond the field of research. Patel's paper highlights the uncomfortable situation of the researcher who feels politically involved with the 'subjects' of research but remains dependent upon sponsorship for professional survival. In my contribution I explore the political and practical dilemmas of the 'independent' policy researcher whose findings may still be used for purposes unrelated to her own, suggesting, however, that ignoring or avoiding 'difficult questions' leaves the continuing education community in a fundamentally weak position in policy debates.

Another theme evident in this section is the use of research as a generator of and aid to policy. Clive Millar's contribution suggests that a research focus on practice, at the expense of more fundamental theoretical questions, may be exposed as a weakness when the political context changes and a contribution is required from the academic community to the development of policy for social reconstruction. Although he is writing in the South African context, which clearly has been and remains considerably more turbulent than our own, there are important resonances here for those of us in Britain. Millar suggests that, although the process of demythologising (even the most 'radical') practice discourse may threaten to undermine the interests of practitioners, the process is essential if policy interventions are to be meaningful and constructive. The paper by Andrew Gonczi, Rod McDonald, Paul Hager and Geoff Hayton considers the position of vocational education in Australia. They criticise the predominance of 'client-specific' over 'general issues' research in the field, arguing that a longer-term perspective is needed if a usable policy critique is to be developed.

The remaining papers focus upon specific manifestations of the relationship between research and context. Ruth Winterton gives an interesting account of collaborative research as a means of 'empowerment' for a particular group and as a conscious tool of industrial struggle — in this instance, the campaign to avert the demise of the coal industry. Keith Forrester considers the practice of collaborative research as a means of integrating research with its context, blurring the boundaries between the two and thus transforming both the process of research (including established methodologies) and its epistemological basis. Both papers raise important questions about the extent to which collaborative research can function as an effective political tool.

The phenomenon of inexperienced students conducting research in adult education centres is examined by Helen Jones, who argues that the ends in this case are insufficient justification for the means. A case is made for the greater involvement of experienced practitioners in the selection and design of research projects, on the grounds that a collaborative approach would more effectively meet the centres' needs. Avtar Brah and Alison Kaye's paper considers the effects of changes in the local political and social context upon a particular research project and on the relationships between researchers and their 'subjects'.

The papers approach their related themes from different angles, converging in their recognition that research does not occur in a social and political vacuum, but can have — should have? — potentially serious implications both for researchers and for those who provide them with their data. This is not such a truism as it might appear. In a changing and increasingly uncongenial political and social climate, and particularly at a point where CE itself has at last become the subject of policy debate, all of those engaged in research have a responsibility to analyse more carefully the relationship between the research process and the context within which its fruits are produced and consumed.

Keeping the customer satisfied: research, accountability and the market place

Paul Armstrong
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Total quality

A total quality organisation will seek to keep its customers satisfied. The core values of a total quality culture include

- putting the customer first
- anticipating and knowing customer expectations; and
- meeting and exceeding customer expectations.

The onus is on the organisation, if it is to be successful in the marketplace, to monitor customer requirements and to invite the customer to comment on the degree of satisfaction with the services or products provided. Customer care is a key feature, and builds a link between being competitive and promoting the image of a company or organisation as caring and considerate. Quality indicators include such aspects as how the telephone is answered, whether car parking is provided, how visitors are received into the building, whether the working environment is attractive and comfortable, whether correspondence dealt with promptly and politely, and so on.

Such general customer requirements are often overlooked, but these can make a lasting impression particularly in the public service sector, since the organisation, its employees and the premises are, ultimately, there only to provide a quality service to the customer.

But who really is the customer? Total Quality distinguishes the external customers (those who receive or purchase a service or a product) and the internal customers (staff or other employees) since everyone in an organisation is both a supplier and a customer of a service or product, and work processes are defined in these terms. Unless internal customers are satisfied, it is unlikely that external customers will have their requirements met, first time, every time.

This customer orientation is then a key aspect of the development of a Total Quality Culture that provides the foundation of Total Quality Management. Like most of the principles of TQM, much of this is at the level of rhetoric and exhortation. The practice, the reality, feels quite different. In focusing on the issue of the requirement to provide customer satisfaction, TQM provides a challenge to research organisations that provide both services and products (findings, reports, action plans, evaluations etc.). Working for a research organisation that needs to be both competitive and at the same time, to be seen to be quality-driven, poses some interesting challenges to conventional research practices, and to research in the market place.

Meeting customer requirements

Meeting customer requirements has two major elements:

- identifying those customer requirements and
- ensuring that those customer requirements can be met or even exceeded at minimum cost.

This paper raises the possibility that there is a danger that we could focus too much on the end user or the customer. There are a number of aspects to this shift to a customer service orientation (we are here only to serve you) which emphasises public relations rather than improving quality service, which is manipulative and aimed at changing customers' perceptions rather than reality. A second aspect is that we need to remember that there is a possibility that the customer is not always right; and nor can we ever guarantee to always meet customer requirements under all circumstances and conditions. Nor is it always possible to put the customer first, if only because — and this is particularly the case in providing research services and products — it is not always clear as to who the real customer is. This is an aspect of quality management that is easy to both misunderstand and to misapply.

Customer service

Let us be clear about our starting point. In an educational context,

> Customer service is not about potted plants, carpets, glossy brochures and carefully scripted receptionists. These factors can be significant but are only manifestations of a fundamental obsession with satisfying the customer. There is temptation to assume that smartness equals quality but there is little point in having a sophisticated reception are if it is difficult to find, if the appropriate person is not available and if the quality of (...) learning is not the central focus of any discussion. reviews of the literature on customer service produce lists of strategies, many of

> which fall into the 'have a nice day' syndrome (John West-Burnham, *Managing Quality in Schools*, Longman 1992; p.36).

The difficulty that those of us engaged in research as a professional practice have with this is that sometimes our processes and products lead to someone not having a nice day. It may be that the results of our research require the management of an organisation to confront a difficult problem; or, that the staff in an organisation are required to be more efficient and cost effective or to take voluntary redundancy in the interests of better external customers; or that the residents of a community in the minority lose out to the views of the majority. Whilst the processes and results of much research activity are confirmatory or comforting ('we already knew this'), what are the limits of the responsibilities of the researcher when the findings are challenging, pessimistic or require further action?

The politics of research determine the limits of accountability and specification of the customer. In a paper to the 1986 SCUTREA Conference, I addressed this issue with respect to undertaking evaluation research, recognising that evaluation is always political in nature and derived from biased origins. The power of the sponsors over others as well as the researcher ensures political and professional accountability. In terms of objectivity and taking sides in the debate, the song remains the same (see paper by Patel in this volume). Except that the economic and commercial dimension has now been added in. The contract relationship has taken over the professional commitment. The financial and legal basis of the relationship establishes the supplier-customer relationship, where professional, political and ethical decisions made at an earlier stage become a commitment to the customer.

Decision-making pervades all stages of the research process, and a decision at one point in the process inevitably is constrained by decisions already made and in turn constrains subsequent decision-making. A trading relationship in the market place will certainly strengthen the nature of these constraints and give less flexibility for the researcher to change their mind. The competent researcher now needs to be more far-sighted, more able clearly to see the likely outcomes of a research project than before. The openness and exploratory nature of qualitative research procedures do not fit this research environment, where the researcher might well be expected to anticipate the outcomes of the research process in advance of undertaking that research. The logic of offering a customer-oriented service becomes more apparent, to the extent that the researchers might ultimately be required to provide a guarantee that they can produce a report not only to schedule, but that serves a particular purpose. Payment by results is only a little distance from this position. In turn, the supplier could offer a range of levels of quality service — a small monitoring procedure that satisfies funding bodies can be carried out for 1% of the funding, a short summative evaluation for 3%, or a fuller formative and summative evaluation for 10%, depending on the needs and interests of the customer. The buying of results is a major concern. In my experience, systematic, careful, objective and professional research actions are being increasingly challenged because they do not lead to the kind of results that the sponsors (that is, the customer) expected or needed. The use of research for specific purposes has always been a political issue, but now those who control the purse strings feel they have the right to buy particular outcomes. Not only that but customers are becoming extremely sophisticated in understanding and utilising the power and influence of evaluation procedures and outcomes.

Case studies

The reader may have guessed that I am writing this from bitter experience. To illuminate the problems I shall now present two case studies. They both raise the problem of establishing who your customer is before your agree to undertake a consultancy project, and in both cases there was an element of wishing to buy the results. In true social science style, the cases are real but names are omitted to protect the guilty.

Introducing quality assurance into a college of further education

A friend who was an Education Officer in another London Borough recommended to the Deputy Principal of a Further Education College in that borough that she should contact me regarding advice on quality assurance systems for further education as she was in the process of putting a bid into the Employment Department for funding to carry out a project that would develop and eventually embed a quality assurance system. I went along to the College to discuss issues with a team that had been set up to think about the issue of quality. This was an exploratory meeting, and I largely based my views on the experiences I was having in a college in my own borough doing something similar. As a result of this input, an agreement was made between the Deputy Principal, and my friend, the local authority Education Officer, that I should be approached about doing the work of coordinating the project on the basis of two to three days a week. The project submission was successful in gaining the financial support of the Employment Department, though only 60% of what was required was to be given. The project was to be managed by the local authority, not the College.

At this point, when offered consultancy, I was more concerned about the fact that a friend was by-passing local authority regulations about competitive tendering for such work than that I was to end up with three sets of people to whom I would have to be accountable — the funders of the project, the Employment Department; the managers of the project, the local authority, and the primary customers, the College and in particular its senior management team. Regular steering committee meetings made me increasingly aware of what was expected. On the whole, in the early stages the pressures were not too great, as there was consensus as to what the purpose of the project was, how it would be implemented, and what the outcomes would be. Difficulties arose when differences in views on quality assurance began to emerge particularly between myself and the Deputy Principal. What were quite marginal differences at first began to get quite large and significant. Part of the problem it appears in retrospect was about my location. The context was that this was a period of increasing tension between LEAs and Colleges of FE as they were approaching incorporation. This was to be a difficult transitional period for both LEAs and colleges. It was assumed by the LEA Officer that I would be based at the local authority offices, but would spend considerable time in the college. The Deputy Principal wanted me to be based in the college, but because they did not sort out appropriate accommodation for me, I continued to work from the LEA offices. I was therefore seen as representing the LEA view, and this was confirmed by the other activities I was engaging in with the local authority — identifying the training needs of the College governors, and developing a monitoring and inspection framework that the LEA could use with the College. This was quite naive of me in the context of suspicion and tension. This reflected itself in terms of the perception of my methodology. I was working with a team from the College and although I did have some influence as a consultant, on the whole I felt I was being responsive to the needs of the team. In some ways this was another problem, because the team were largely grassroots lecturing staff with trade union representation. If anything, these became my fourth set of customers, and probably those that I developed the closest affinity with, as we worked together on a regular basis for nearly two years. From the Deputy Principal's perspective I was aligned to both the LEA and the quality assurance project team in the college. One particular issue illustrates the tension. Although not explicitly made clear at the outset, the Deputy Principal's perspective on the project was not merely on quality improvement, but was about using the quality framework as a management tool. There was some discussion about contracts between management and staff, and staff and students. The idea of learning contracts was not new, but the college staff were treading warily because they were not clear about what would happen if they or the students failed to deliver the contract. The contract between management and staff was a tension and needed to be discussed in the context of such sensitive issues as performance appraisal. What was clear was that the project was being used to take on board a number of controversial aspects of organisational and human resource development issues that had not been agreed. By this stage we had completed the first year of the project, and because the methodology was sound if somewhat pedantic the issues had been contained, but the tension as evident.

The second year became much more difficult. The College needed a new principal. The Deputy Principal applied for the post but was unsuccessful. Instead, the job went to a senior LEA officer, previously the line manager of my friend, the Education Officer who had got me this contract in the first place. This complicated matters further because (a) although there was increasing divergence between the Deputy and myself and the strategies I was developing with the College team, at least we shared a commitment to quality, using indicators that were both quantitative and qualitative. The new Principal understood the language of performance rather than quality indicators. My colleague had also began to shift his ground from being fairly neutral and asking the steering committee to trust my professional expertise in undertaking this kind of action research, to also wanting 'quick and dirty fixes' to problems, if only to impress his ex-manager, now the College Principal. The second year of the project continued in a depressed atmosphere in the College as the new Principal made his mark, and started wielding the axe in the interests of economy, not efficiency nor effectiveness.

The gulf was widening, and having not got the Principal post, the Deputy took a lower profile in the project, and shortly after was appointed Principal of another College elsewhere in London, and then spent most of the time in her new institution, showing little interest in this project. But now there was the new Principal. Several efforts were made at getting the Principal involved. He did not attend steering committees, and several meetings that had been set up were cancelled because he had more pressing engagements. There was just one opportunity, shortly before the project reported, to meet with the College Senior Management Team. Because of a lack of information about the future structure of the College, it had been easy enough to develop evaluation and quality assurance procedures, but there was no organisational and decision-making framework within which to locate them. The meeting with the Senior Management

Team revealed that some blueprint existed but that it could not yet be made public until it been agreed with the governing body, but as this was not meeting until after the project deadline set by the Employment Department, it was always going to be difficult to take on board these new arrangements, which would vitally shape what was possible.

The report itself addressed the project aims, objectives and outcomes. It was able to present the findings of the action research process undertaken by myself and the project team, and discussed the difficulties we had been working under. A draft of the final report was presented to the final steering group. This was mostly received favourably, particularly by the Employment Department. The College Principal had been sent a copy but no comments were received by the time of the Steering Committee. Most discussion was around the recommendations. Although they were considered fair and as emerging from the project methodology, it was felt that they were biased towards the improvement of the college from the point of view of the staff and students, but were not realistic and could not be delivered in the current environment. Some minor amendments in wording were agreed and the steering group accepted the report subject to those amendments being made. I had just completed the agreed amendments and was about to go to print when I received an urgent message from the College Principal, not to proceed with the report until he had an opportunity to discuss it with me. I tried in vain to contact him over the next few days, but he was always too busy to deal with this. The Employment Department asked me why I had not yet delivered it, and they reiterated that as far as they were concerned they were happy with the amended version. My colleague, the Education Officer, told me that I should not go ahead with the report, as the College Principal had serious doubts about the report. A member of the project team informally told me that the Principal had told him that it was the 'worst piece of writing he had ever seen'. Some achievement, I suppose! Eventually, through the Education Officer, contact was made and it turned out that the disagreement was around the recommendations. Some of the recommendations had resource implications. This, I believe, is inevitable. Quality is not free, nor even cheap. College staff could undertake this as part of their role without more support and without some in-depth staff development. However, the College Principal wished me to re-write the recommendations, and gave me advice on what to write. As some of these did not come out of the research process I would not concede to them all, but did make some amendments which I thought were reasonable to compromise on. The Principal was still not happy, and after consultation with the Employment Department, and the Education Officer, I refused to change the report any more, but left a version with the Education Officer on disk, and asked that if he, as project manager, chose to make any changes, he removed reference to my research organisation. I do not know whether further changes were made. But the recommendations have never been implemented.

Changing organisational structures

My boss rang me one morning. 'I've got a job for you'. I immediately entered my defensive mode. But no, I would enjoy this and it could lead on to more research and consultancy work. I was to carry out some interviews for the newly appointed Head of Human Resources of the Council, whom they had brought in from industry. I was to talk to all Directors of Council Departments about the work of three central units: finance, legal and committee administration, to find out whether they would prefer to leave them central or to decentralise them into their own directorates. The choice of the three areas was not made clear, but afterwards I found out that two of the three were red herrings, and the third was the area that was targeted. I had two days to carry out the interviews and produce a report. The interviews also had to include the managers of the central services in question. Everyone but me knew what was going on, it seemed. There had been agreement to this in a council meeting, but only within certain parameters which were not clearly communicated to me by the new Head of Human Resources. He confirmed that this was to be an open-minded, exploratory piece of research which would inform their decision-making. What I found surprising was that in carrying out the interviews, the only ones who held strong views were the three managers who felt threatened, and the Head of Human Resources, who was quite clear what the outcomes of the research should and would be. After two or three interviews with Directors it became quite clear that their views were discrepant with those of the new Head of Human Resources. Before writing the report I checked with my line manager about whether I could write an objective report, even if it disagreed with the Head of Human Resources' perspective. He assured me that I could. And so I did. I completed the project report within the 48 hour deadline, personally delivered it to his secretary to ensure it arrived on time. Five hours later I received a message to ring the Head of Human Resources immediately. I assumed he wanted to thank me for getting such an impressive, well researched report to him by the tight deadline.

Him: 'You've not done what I asked you to.'

Me: 'What do you mean? I've interviewed everybody and written a summary report'.

Him: 'I wanted a statement of the advantages and disadvantages of centralisation of resources.'

Me: 'That's what you have got'.

Him: 'Yes, but I wanted it laid out in a simple way not lost somewhere in a report.'

Me: 'No problem, I can do that from what I've written first thing in the morning.'

Him: 'There is something else.'

Me: 'What's that?'

Him: 'I can't see my views included in there.'

Me: 'Yes they are, in several places. For example, on page 5, I've written "Only one person expressed the view that the Committee administration should be centralised; all others were quite happy with the status quo".'

Him: 'Didn't I give you a list of the advantages of centralisation of the Committee administration?'

Me: 'You did, but they were insignificant compared with the points made by the Head of Committee Administration.'

Him: 'Look, I want to see my views expressed more clearly.'

Me: 'Okay, I'll see what I can do.'

And so I looked at what I had written again. I inserted a table which identified a number of aspects of centralisation and summarised the views for and against, laid out in two columns. I decided not to alter anything else, and delivered a revised report first thing the following morning.

Two days later, I had a telephone call from the Director of Finance. He wanted to meet me to discuss the report that had been circulated. I said that I would need to check with the Head of Human Resources as I had not been commissioned to undertake wider consultations. He said that would be no problem, and that I should enjoy it, but could I let him know afterwards what was discussed. When I turned up for the meeting, the Director of Finance was not alone; he had with him the three managers of the central services I had interviewed to get some of the data. He said they wanted to go through the report, correct some errors and make some changes.

Director of Finance: 'First of all, you will need to delete the second to fourth paragraphs on page two as you were only asked to look at budget control, not audit and the other services.'

Me: 'Hold on a minute. I'm quite happy to listen to your comments and justify what I've written, but I can't see that I can change the report as it was commissioned by the Head of Human Resources. He specifically told me that I should look at Finance in its entirety. In fact, when your colleague told me that I should only be looking at budget control, I contacted him and he confirmed that I should be taking a broader perspective. Surely he would need to agree, if I felt the changes were justified as it is his report.'

Director of Finance: 'No, it isn't, it's my report. I asked him to have the research done, and all four of us and he met to discuss it. The Borough Solicitor took the minutes, didn't you? Didn't we say it was only budget control?'

Borough Solicitor: 'Yes, I've got it quite clear here in the minutes in front of me.'

Me: 'Okay, I'll agree to take that out, and I'm prepared to correct factual errors I've made, but I'm not going to change any interpretations I have made. They still stand, even if you disagree with them. The paper was intended to stimulate further discussion, and so there is not point in me sanitising the report now so that there is no scope left for discussion.'

Concluding comment

It is easy enough to take an ethical position in these situations which is purist is intent. To refuse to change the findings of a report at the request of senior management of an organisation because it has resource implications, or of the sponsors of a project because the conclusions do not coincide with their own views, is justifiable. We cannot expect, however, to receive a further contract again through that senior management or sponsor again because they may not always share the researcher's professional ethical stance. Moreover, we may not wish to contract with organisations that are prepared to demand outcomes regardless of the research -process. We can refuse to tender for work for this government department, that local authority, this university, that college of further education, this private company, that voluntary organisation.

On the other hand, would a researcher wish his or her own organisation to come to be known as one that is prepared to sell its soul along with predetermined results? The effect in any case would almost certainly be to undermine the validity and reliability of such findings, and the research organisation would still end up failing to thrive in the market place. So if both a moral and an immoral stance is likely to lead to failure, then there is nothing to gain from being anything less than professional in the commissioning, planning, implementing of research and the delivery of its findings. Virtue may have its own rewards, if only we can survive that long.

Researching educational and training guidance needs of bilingual women: issues in research

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Introduction

THIS paper examines particular aspects related to the use of qualitative research methods on a research project concerned with addressing the educational and guidance training needs of bilingual women living in West London. Set predominantly in Southall in the London Borough of Ealing the project had its roots in a former developmental project run at the Centre for Extra-Mural Studies, 'Extending Educational Opportunities to the Asian Adult Unemployed'. Funded by the UFC, it has two stated aims:

(1) to analyse the education and training guidance needs of bilingual ethnic minority women.

(2) to analyse the factors in successful provision through a study of the principles, structure and delivery of current guidance provision.

In terms of carrying out the research the project divided neatly into two separately funded stages of one year each. The first year of the research was primarily concerned with interviewing the two selected groups of women, Asian and Somali, in order to document their expressions of education and training guidance needs. The following and present year has so far being preoccupied with mapping and documenting current guidance provision for adults in the fieldwork area, the London Borough of Ealing and has consisted of interviews with a variety of providers of adult education and training guidance.

Prior to discussing the interviews and particular issues arising in more detail the first section of the paper considers the geographical location of the research and the significance of place. This is followed by a further two sections; the second provides a brief profile of the two groups of bilingual women interviewees, how interviewees were contacted and focuses in brief upon the use of interpreters in research of this nature. The final section describes the range of interviewees who participated in the second stage 'provider' interviews and looks at how the structural and financial reorganisation of adult education services affected the process of the research.

Place

Southall in the west London Borough of Ealing has one of the largest Asian populations in Britain. Asians from the Punjab began to migrate to the area in the fifties. This was initially the movement of males for work, with family reunification occuring in the 60s. By no means an homogenous population, the early, predominantly Sikh Punjabis were joined by East African Asians with British passports from Kenya and Tanzania. In the early seventies, Ugandan Asians began to arrive, expelled from Idi Amin's Uganda.

The year 1979 marked a watershed in the struggle over resources when an anti-fascist demonstration resulted in the tragic death of Blair Peach. In the eighties anti-racist activism was in part supported by GLC initiatives and an activist voluntary sector flourished for a while.

In recent years, many of these initiatives have become more difficult to support in an era of increasing conservatism and recession. The population profile of Southall has also changed as refugee groups, amongst them Somalis, have moved into the area, bringing with them pressing needs related to education, housing and health.

Stage one: bilingual women interviewees

The interviews with bilingual women, like those with educational and training guidance providers, were carried out using qualitative research methods. For both sets of interviews, structured interview schedules were drawn up based upon previous informal meetings with the relevant groups. All interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed.

Four groups of women were outlined: women returners; women with overseas qualifications; unemployed and those wanting to re-skill. An initial pivotal contact was Jasbir Panesar, the worker on the CEMS 'Asian Unemployed' project. Her wide network of contacts provided an important and broad range of contacts, many of which, especially those at grassroots level, would have otherwise been very difficult for me as an outsider and as a white woman to have established.

Jasbir introduced five key contacts; Shanti Niketran, an Asian women's family centre based in a block of council flats in Southall; Golf Links Community Centre on the Golf Links estate, where women attended ESOL and Pre-school Playgroup Association classes; the Dominion Community Centre in the heart of Southall, again via PPA classes and Pathway

College (now part of the Ealing Tertiary College) for students whose first language is not English; a local authority outreach project. Avtar Brah carried out ten interviews in Punjabi through contact at the Shanti Niketran Centre and the remainder Alison Kaye carried out by prior arrangement in individuals homes. Contact with Somali women was also made through the community centre network via Somali groups. Ultimately, one group, the Ealing Somali Welfare and Cultural Association based in West Ealing proved to be the sole point of contact. The ESWCA provides an important focal point for many Somalis living in Ealing, providing as it does ESOL classes for women, Saturday classes for children and help and advice on a range of issues from housing to immigration.

Twenty-five Somali women, twenty-two via Somali interpreters were interviewed by Alison Kaye.

Interpreters

Interpreters were crucial to the success of interviews with Somali women as Alison Kaye, the researcher, spoke no Somali and the majority of women to be interviewed spoke little or no English. In turn the choice of interpreters; background and experience (RTEC 1992), gender and in the Somali context, clan affiliation was central. In carrying out interviews of this nature with women, especially refugees who have undergone highly traumatic and intense life changing situations in a short, troubled period of time, one of the main aims is to make interviews as relaxed and unitimidating as possible. Ideally the interpreters would be familiar with the women who agreed to be interviewed.

Fortunately, the ESWCA was able to suggest two fluent English speaking women, Asha and Khadiga,[1] refugees themselves who agreed to act as interpreters. Asha and Khadiga were both involved in the activities of ESWCA and were therfore well known to the women. Both had previous experience of interpreting in a variety of situations and were skilled in both interpreting and interviewing. As refugee women themselves they shared a common background with the interviewees who in turn could identify with them, a crucial factor in these interviews.

In fact their knowledge and experience became as important to the research as their interpreting skills and they came to act as 'key informants'. Both in the particular areas of the research and in the broader issues facing Somali refugee women in rebuilding new lives for themselves and their families in London.

A vital aspect of work with interpreters is the relationship which develops between the interpreters and the researcher. From the beginning both interpreters were closely involved in the development of the interview schedule and were closely consulted about the background of Somali refugee women. Spelman (1988) in particular has spoken about the apprenticing of oneself in work with women of different racial and ethnic backgrounds, a concept which became useful in this instance.

Provider interviews

Interviewees came from both the public and voluntary sector and included local authority ESOL providers; Adult Education; Community Centres; Careers Service; Ealing Tertiary College; West London TEC; Southall Black Sisters; Southall Law Centre; community groups. The breadth of interviewees reflecting by and large the multi-faceted and wide ranging nature of education and training guidance provision for adults in the locality. The interview schedule was designed to gather information about practioners knowledge, expertise and practice of adult education and training guidance.

Several of the interviewees had been contacted on an informal basis approximately one year previously as part of the initial familiarisation with the structure and provision of local guidance. During the elapse of that year several changes had taken place in the structure, funding and staffing of adult education and guidance provision, so that when it came to interviewing the 'providers', who and what had existed just twelve months before was no longer the case. What had become familiar and had initially been used as a basis for the research had changed. This had several consequences as far as both the research aims and the actual process of research were concerned, both of which are of course closely interconnected.

Initially the task which presented itself was to document the changes, both to map new vistas of guidance provision and to identify interviewees for the second stage. There were two major changes but with myriad and as yet largely unkown effects; one was the shift in financial and organisational responsibility for adult education from the local authority to Ealing Tertiary College (known as ETC!) and the second savage across-the-board cuts in council services and personnel.

The national movement in the shift to tertiary colleges manifested itself in Ealing with the amalgamation of Southall, Ealing and Acton FE colleges, Southall having incorporated Pathway College for students whose first language is not English the previous year. The result of this was that Pathway, previoulsy independent, had now been incorporated into the wider college and, as elsewhere, its staff and student services suffered redundancies and cuts. As far as the research was concerned, Pathway was an important contact, given its role as a major provider of FE for bilingual students in the borough. Prior to the restructuring and cuts it had provided an in-house guidance service with a multi-disciplinary student support team which seemed to be an ideal model. This had now disappeared. Asian women attending the college had alreay participated in the research and it had been anticipated that further research would be done there.

Similarly, cuts within Ealing Council had also altered the map of guidance provision for adults. Partly as a result of central government pressure and the advent of a Tory council in 1990, Ealing residents, as far as guidance provision is concerned, have effectively less public access to guidance services than in the past ten years. Cuts in guidance provision have been affected by three issues; the first referred to above is the shift in provision of adult education to the tertiary colleges; secondly the shift in emphasis to the TECs as EGSA providers although they are under no legal obligation to provide it; the third is the fact that local authorities like the TECs do not have to provide adult guidance as a statutory obligation unlike Careers Guidance for 16-19 year olds, so that the council cut its already limited, oversubscribed, non-publicised service for adults.

The effects of these transitions upon the research were several-fold. Practically there was the question of contact; targetted interviewees had often stayed in the same organisation but shifted jobs, whilst several had undergone greater or lesser changes in their job description. As a researcher trying to contact people telephonically one of the most immediate impressions created by the change was that people had become considerably more difficult to get hold of and seemed to have become, if they had stayed in work, much more embroiled in bureaucratic organisation. The extent to which they had moved away from guidance work with adults varied and this caused considerable confusion both on the part of the researcher and the potential interviewee. For example an outreach guidance initiative run by the council had ceased to be in operation by the time of the second stage interviews and there were no plans for its future. However the workers remained employees of the council, albeit in different posts. Did we go ahead and interview workers about a project which was now in the past?

How interviewees chose to react was undoubtedly influenced by the cuts and changes in job descriptions so that confidentiality, always an integral part of research, became a pressing matter for several interviewees. Connected to this was how individuals rated the intrinsic and immediate value of the research. Often demoralised by the changes which had occured and frequently unsure of the future, both in terms of their individual careers and in that of adult guidance, justifying the research and its potential benefits had to be approached with a great deal of tact.

Finally there is the issue of how the research is written up. Given the restructuring which has taken place, how is the future of educational guidance and training to be presented? How and in what light is the material to be presented?

FOOTNOTE

[1] 'Asha' and 'Khadiga' are aliases to protect the identity of the women employed as interpreters on the project.

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Collaborative research practices and the wider community: the case of the trade unions

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Introduction

THE increasing importance and significance, over the last decade, of research activities in British universities for institutional well-being and individual career development has, it seems, mirrored a parallel trend which increasingly views the nature of social research as a given, non-problematic activity. Increasingly absent from the recent social science literature are the debates and broadsides angrily fired off by the likes of Lynd (1939), Becker (1967) or C W Mills (1959). Increasingly absent too is the recognition by the industrial relations research community of the partiality resulting from too close an association with employers' interests or money. Recent exceptions to this growing trend include the growing literature on feminist methodology (Hammersley, 1992; Harding, 1987; Bowles et al 1983; Harding et al 1983) and within education studies where there has been a long established interest in pupil-teacher learning concerns (Winter, 1979; Kemmis et al 1982). The pedagogic concerns of University adult continuing education has similarly ensured that the category of research remains a contested area to a greater extent than is evident in most other areas of scholarship.

Nowhere is this perhaps more evident within adult continuing education than in the areas of community and labour education (Ward et al 1986). Despite the forebodings of various practitioners such as Collins (1991) who warns against the 'increasingly array of pedagogical techniques' and 'trappings of a cult of efficiency' within adult continuing education, a practice linked to satisfying collective economic and social needs ensures that conceptions of research remain contentions and problematic. As Tawney (1926) argued some seventy years ago, 'if you want education' or research, 'you must not cut it off from the social interests in which it has its living and perennial sources'.

This paper reviews three collaborative research projects involving different groups of trade unionists in the Yorkshire area undertaken in the 1980s. Leeds busworkers sought to understand the sources of their ill-health, catalogue mail-order workers sought to develop alternative strategies to those of the employers in the introduction of new technology and finally, representatives from a number of manufacturing companies investigated the link between local workplace research activity and the wider trade union through the development of trade union plans of action. In each case, a group of employees worked with a team of adult educationalists. A detailed evaluation of these research experiences has been provided elsewhere (Forrester, 1992). This paper will instead reflect on those research projects and focus on how Tawney's 'social interests' shapes and influences the character and direction of social research activities. In particular, the paper will focus on the nature of a *collaborative* research experience and how this collaboration impacts on conceptions of research. It will be argued that such a collaborative project, involving other social audiences, must confront and contest five critical issues. These critical issues raise much larger theoretical concerns but nevertheless forcefully push the 'doing of the research' along particular paths.

Understanding the process of collaboration

Attempting to understand the nature of 'collaboration' within a research practice is complex. At its most simple level, collaboration implies a sentiment of cooperation, mutuality or solidarity between the researcher(s) and research subjects. Collaboration suggests a jointness or sharing of tasks and experiences. A workers' report or a community research project might be so labelled because the research question has been essentially formulated by workers or community activists. At its most minimal level, the 'collaboration' might have resulted from the financial buying of research expertise over a particular question: an unfortunately common occurrence that often results in disappointment and cynicism by the sponsoring voluntary organisation.

Noble as the above sentiments may be in understanding the nature of collaboration within the process of research they are ultimately inadequate. A collaborative research experience is one which, by the very process, confronts what is understood by research. The distinctive feature of the collaboration is a methodological concern. Collaboration, in other words, is ultimately not about who pays or who formulated the research questions or the membership of the research team (such as trade unionists, community activists, women) or who is involved in the data collection techniques. Rather, collaboration shapes and influences what can be known, how can we know and why we want to know. A collaborative research experience confronts what can be accepted or legitimated as knowledge. As such there is an intimate relationship between methodological concerns and epistemological issues. Methodologically, collaborative research activities engage with the more common or traditional conceptions of 'how research should be undertaken'.

Collaborative research in practice

A weakness of those challenging the dominant empiricist conception of science (McNiff, 1988; Usher & Byrant 1989) is often the absence of articulated conceptions of practice characterising alternative research strategies. Listed below are, it is suggested, the essential methodological characteristics of a collaborative research practice. Each of the areas contribute towards a conception of the research process which qualitatively differs from dominant understandings of 'what is to be understood' as knowledge generation. Firstly, a collaborative research project is shaped, throughout the activity, by the views and experiences of the participating research 'subjects'. From the origins of the research activity and formulation of research questions through to the various outcomes, the incorporation of community or labour experiences are central. The traditional invisibility of such concerns and the detached and distancing of such experiences within traditional research designs are rejected. What questions are asked, and, even more significantly, those that are not asked contribute towards the adequacy of the final picture.

Secondly, a collaborative research experience will develop and use a range of methods of data collection denied to traditional methodologies and so have a greater explanatory power than traditional social inquiry. Uncontentious techniques familiar to much social research will be in evidence but, additionally, other methods available only to the participating audience will be identified or designed. Involvement in the process of research together with the development of innovative methods qualitatively contributes towards an understanding of what can be known and whether 'subjective truths' count as knowledge. Rather than being relegated to the domain of philosophers of science, such epistemological concerns are an integral part of 'doing the research'.

Thirdly, a collaborative research design will include questions of decision making and forms of accountability as central continuing concerns of the research process. The nature, direction and outcomes of any particular collaborative research experience will be crucially affected by the decision making within the research process and the forms of accountability linking this research activity to a wider collective audience. In most examples of collaborative research, the research itself is a small but important aspect of a wider audience such as tenants on an estate, unwaged people in a community or employees within a company. The research activity 'intervenes' within this greater whole while being, at the same time, one of the numerous forms of activity undertaken by the non-researching collective. Failure to integrate adequately the research within the wider audience will result in the research activity becoming marginalised, or 'academic'.

Fourthly, the *role* of the independent researchers within a collaborative research design is part of the research process and available for scrutiny in the results of the research. Far from being an invisible, anonymous voice of authority — detached and objective — as is usually the case in social research, the researchers appear as real, historical individuals with concrete specific values and interests. 'Only in this way can we hope to produce understandings and explanations which are free (or, at least, more free) of distortion from unexamined beliefs and behaviours of the social scientists themselves' (Harding, 1987:9).

Fifthly, collaborative research practices are likely to be characterised by not only a logic of research but also of action. The process of 'knowing' is intimately linked to a wider objective of 'doing' and then perhaps 'knowing' again. Emancipatory objectives are intricably linked with the production of knowledge. The 'truth' and value of knowledge generation activities are not ultimately dependent on particular principles and rules, but on the potential to orient the process of praxis towards progressive emancipation and humanisation' (Mies, 1983:124). This linking of 'knowledge' and 'activity' is perhaps the most fragile yet complex of tasks. Given that the research phase is likely to be part of wider project involving a larger (sometimes, much larger) audience with its own decision-making structures, there is the distinct possibility that the integration, patterns and sequence of 'learning' and 'doing' will be severely disrupted and so severing the researching from the wider collective activity. 'Getting it right', on the other hand, promises a qualitative deepening and extending of the research activity.

Irrespective of the complexity in forging a collaborative research activity and the tensions inherent within such a relationship between the researcher and research 'subjects', the five areas listed above advocate and provide the basis of a different framework of understanding and thus a different framework for establishing 'facts'. What is to be understood as 'science' from this perspective rests on distinct methodological and, therefore, epistemological principles to the more dominant natural science tradition. Both traditions, it can be argued, rest on different assumptions and principles regarding what is knowledge about the social world and how it can be legitimately produced. Uniquely, however, the collaborative research perspective flows from Tawney's 'social interests' and at the same time develops the means by which people in the community or at work confront, critically and creatively, reality in the attempt to transform that reality (Forrester *et al.* 1993).

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Student research and LEA adult and continuing education: 'They always promise — never produce'

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WHEN university staff talk about research, they are referring to a wide range of activities leading to the increase in the sum of knowledge, greater understanding, modification of practice and, of course, publication. When students talk about research, they are referring to an exercise which, first and often foremost, contributes to the attainment of the qualification for which they are studying. It is the experience of being the victim of the latter which has led to concern amongst staff, students and users of LEA adult and continuing education centres which could have serious implications for their future co-operation both with staff and with students undertaking research. Anecdotal evidence concerning being the subject of research is not hard to find and questions concerning experiences elicit responses which can be strong. One experienced worker said that researchers, 'regard people like us as a resource — a lost tribe' and that they 'show scant regard for us despite their proclaimed liberal attitudes'. It is important to examine the areas of concern raised by adult and continuing education workers together with their suggestions which could lead to a more fruitful, two-way relationship between students undertaking research as part of pre-degree and first degree courses and the subjects of that research. Research is now an element of courses as diverse as architecture, youth and community work, health education, organisation studies and social work as well as teaching and education. Adult and continuing education workers, students and users have encountered researchers from this entire list.

The first difficulty involves the selection of the actual subject or topic for research. Workers observed that students often seemed to be attracted to a narrow range of topics. Sometimes individuals, inexperienced in undertaking research, seemed to have been ill-advised by university or college staff. The instance was cited of white students researching the sensitive subject of the suicide rate among young Asian women. Adult and continuing education workers agreed that they could suggest interesting and fruitful topics suitable for student research which would benefit all involved. Whilst students' freedom to select a topic is important, there is the possibility that they are not fully cognizant with the full range of possibilities, especially if they are new to a town, and workers' involvement could lead to new opportunities. Additionally, this would avoid circumstances where the only immediate beneficiaries of the research were the students themselves. As one worker pointed out, patients in hospitals are accustomed to being surrounded by student doctors who are not yet qualified to diagnose and treat. This relationship between student and subject requires sympathy and patience on the part of the subject and is of no assistance to them but is of incalculable value to the student. However, the worker suggested that this is not a desirable model in the context of students undertaking research, despite the fact that the students are future workers in the field. There is no reason why students undertaking research should not engage in investigations which local workers believe to be useful and thus refute accusations of 'leeching' off people. Many workers could suggest suitable small scale projects which they would value, sometimes out of interest but often in order to measure the effectiveness and impact of their work. The student could have the advantage of perceived neutrality and achieve studies impossible for workers to undertake themselves.

An additional aspect of the question of students undertaking research into areas for which they are not necessarily suited is the position into which this forces the workers in adult and continuing education. It could be suggested that University and college staff held some responsibility for not explaining difficulties and guiding students into more suitable areas, for example allowing men to imagine that they would be able to undertake research in a women's centre. Although university and college staff may imagine that there is an important learning experience for the student researcher in meeting such a situation, this is presuming on the confidence and experience of the workers in the community adult education centre and also assumes that they have time to spend on work that ought to have been done within the course. Furthermore, some researchers' initial approaches were also found to show a lack of sensitivity. Given that the work is inherently flexible, they imagined that visits were always welcomed and no official approach prior to the research was required. Quoting the centre's publicity, which invited people to 'drop in', one researcher was angry when nobody was available at that moment to participate in a survey. Others failed to appreciate the rôle of local management committees and omitted to approach them to seek their permission or agreement before the research was started. There was also a lack of sensitivity to issues of race and gender both in choice of subject and manner of approach.

The second area of difficulty is closely related. For example, research into the levels of racism operating within a centre, a topic of appeal to students, ought to reveal to the workers something of which they are aware. Only longitudinal research will tell workers whether the work they are doing is having any positive impact or neutral or even detrimental effects. Although the organisational demands of an academic course may appear incompatible with research with a time lapse element, it might be possible to arrange links between single courses and centres. This would make longitudinal research possible although different students would be involved each year. The research itself would be of potentially great value to adult and continuing education workers and would thus render the experience of the researcher infinitely more satisfactory than the customary one-sided relationship.

Workers suggested that there were often a lack of clear research objectives or conversely, an unshakable hypothesis which research was undertaken to prove. Both were thought to be the result of insufficient guidance by university and college staff. The danger of finding evidence to support utterly opposing suppositions is particularly acute in community contexts and the short time allotted to much student research increased the risk. Mitchell, writing on the topic of being researched, describes a researcher who, 'had a very clear preconceived notion' and whose research 'was being used to provide evidence to confirm her already fixed ideas'[1]. This was clearly unlikely to generate confidence in participating workers, students and users who needed to feel that the researcher was willing to listen and learn and did not hold entrenched ideas or prejudices.

Continuing education centre students and users tend to react in one of two ways at the prospect of being involved. A few are suspicious, a feeling sometimes resulting from experiences with various officials and agencies. Many are pleased to talk about their opinions and experiences and feel that this shows that their ideas are valued. The researcher has to take responsibility for explaining the nature of the research, the participants' rights and what would be done with the results of the study. The right of the staff, users and students who had been researched to read the completed work should be established, or it would need to be made clear that confidentiality would mean that this right did not apply. Workers were unanimous in agreeing that participants were disappointed when copies of the research were not forthcoming and that this was illustrative of a lack of sensitivity and respect on the researchers' part. Seidman, writing about interviewing, describes one model; 'My practice has been to offer to share with participants any material that concerns them. I especially want to know if in working with the interview data I have done anything that makes them vulnerable, or if I have presented anything that is not accurate ... I retain the right to write the final report as I see it'[2]. Participants are entitled to have their rights to anonymity, privacy and confidentiality respected. In addition, they are entitled to have their wishes respected; for example, a refusal to be photographed may be based on previous experience of the misuse of photos.

The Data Protection Act offers protection against inaccurate computer data. Many records have to be available to individuals concerned. However, where research is concerned, there seems to be no opportunity for such access. Workers remarked that researchers often promised to discuss drafts of their reports and always promised to send a copy of their completed work but that they never delivered. This could have serious implications for workers, management committees and centres as a whole, particularly within voluntary organisations where there were possible funding implications. In some cases, conclusions included criticism which, in the workers' opinion, was based on an incomplete understanding of the context, background and environment, or was the result of the workers' failure to explain what they meant intelligibly. Where practice is questioned, it is important that the findings are shared with the workers and users whose work, attitudes or behaviour are criticised and that researchers appreciate the fact that their work could have results beyond the gaining of a qualification for themselves. Bell advises researchers to inform participants whether the information is 'for your eyes and those of the examiner only' [3]. This is unlikely to be possible due to cross-marking and external examiners. There is a possibility that the researcher may not appreciate the fact that their work may be read by university or college staff and external examiners who coincidentally have a role on bodies where local policy or funding priorities are determined. Although staff and external examiners will show integrity, there is clearly the chance that 'inside information' could inform the decisions they make, even unconsciously. Thus there could be serious implications for the very existence of the project.

The implications of the experiences of the victims of research include not only the obvious reluctance to participate in future or the withdrawal of co-operation but also the temptation to indulge in deliberately mischievous fabrication of anecdotal evidence. There are several possible forms of action which can be taken to improve the situation and workers in adult and continuing education appear keen to see the development of systems which they feel would benefit all parties involved. Firstly, workers might be involved in outlining possible topics for student research; their co-operation and commitment would be greater where research was of interest to their centre as well as meeting the personal and academic requirements of the researcher. Such discussions could end the phenomenon of what one worker described as 'research of the bloody obvious' either by encouraging the research of previously unexplored topics or by showing workers that 'obvious' was their personal and subjective interpretation. Secondly, preparations for research should include the establishment of clear criteria with regard to the rights of participants especially vis-à-vis confidentiality, anonymity and the sharing of the final report. Courses need to include discussion around these issues together with that of sensitivity to the people and subject matter of the research since there is potential for disruption and even damage if inappropriate behaviour or methods are employed. It is essential that colleges and universities take responsibility for ensuring that all students undertaking research understand that not only are people 'who agree to help ... doing you a favour'[4] but also that participants have rights.

The number of pre-degree and first degree courses requiring students to undertake research is growing and so it is timely to address the subject. Although workers in LEA adult and continuing education centres are busy, there seemed to be a general enthusiasm for involvement in research and for the new perspectives which students offered. Workers' concerns and suggestions are often based on years of practical experience and their involvement could lead to students having the chance to undertake work of practical use to workers, students or users in centres. Provided an environment of mutual respect and understanding is established, all parties involved will gain from the experience and it could prove to be a useful and exciting opportunity for everyone involved.

FOOTNOTES

[1] Mitchell, P., (1985), 'On being researched' in Shipman M. (ed), *Educational Research: Principles, Policies and Practices*, The Falmer Press, Lewes, East Sussex, p86.

[2] Seidman, I E., (1991), *Interviewing as Qualitative Research*, Teachers College Press, New York, p74.

[3] Bell, J., (1987), *Doing Your Research Project*, Open University Press, Milton Keynes, p46.

[4] Bell, J., *op.cit.*, p47

Negotiating the minefield: practical and political issues in policy research

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ONE of the major strands in continuing education research has long been a focus on practice — the facilitation and individual experience of learning — which may, intentionally or otherwise, exclude any broader analysis of the social impact of particular forms of practice. Another major strand has been the focus on the actual and desired roles and functions of CE in its political and social context — how things are and how far this diverges from how things ought to be — often with little explicit attention to the changes in policy and practice which might result in desirable change. These two 'micro' and 'macro' strands have usually run parallel courses and have only rarely been combined to produce a perspective on the social consequences of specific aspects of educational practice. This lack of a more fully integrated perspective has given rise to a situation where arguments about continuing education policy frequently take place on a largely speculative (albeit obviously ideological) level; policies are advocated or opposed as if the protagonists were certain of their consequences, although the evidence from which this certainty derives may be either flimsy and circumstantial, or purely theoretical. Policy research can be seen as a possible point of intersection between these two strands, where attempts can be made to integrate the evidence gleaned from practice with broader social and political analyses.

One possible explanation for the relative scarcity of policy-oriented research in CE is that it is just too difficult to do. It presents particular problems, whether it is research *on* policy or research *for* policy — the distinction may amount on the face of it to little more than a difference in funding, but this in itself has implications, both for the ease with which the research can be carried out, and for the political constraints to which it is subject. Often it is concerned with a situation which continues to develop unpredictably as the research is being carried out, and which has no clearly-defined boundaries. A historical perspective is required to enable the situation to be explained in terms of its evolution, and this is likely to present problems which are common to other varieties of historical research. However, much data-gathering in policy research involves examining very recent or even current events and eliciting information from people who may still be engaged in these events on a day-to-day basis, or from ephemeral documentary evidence of questionable status. The most obvious frustration in this situation is the phenomenon of 'instant history' — no sooner has a sentence hit the page than the tide of events seems to deprive it of whatever validity it may have had. But this is something one can learn to live with. Of greater significance are the methodological difficulties of researching policy in continuing education, and the political and ethical difficulties which work in this field poses for both the researcher and the researched.

The conceptually slippery nature of policy as a field of study may be one of the reasons why it has remained an unattractive choice for many CE researchers. The arguments about the competing claims of various disciplines to 'ownership' of the field, and whether particular areas of policy require their own varieties of analysis, not to mention long-standing disputes about theory, methodology and measurement, might suggest that there are more secure and respectable ways of employing one's research skills. However as we know there is, from a methodological standpoint at least, no such thing as secure research.

The practical difficulties of carrying out policy research are not confined to the field of education, although they have been more comprehensively explored in other areas. Classical 'experimental' designs for evaluating the impact of policy — usually involving control groups who are not exposed to the policy 'treatment', and the measurement of variables at the beginning and end of a programme — are well-nigh impossible to arrange, and in any case raise a number of questions about the ethics, desirability and validity of such an approach which have been well rehearsed elsewhere. The simplicity of the experimental design may nevertheless have a superficial attraction for the epistemologically-challenged researcher, despite its major weaknesses, because its scientific antecedents seem to offer the tantalising hope of finding data that might just be construed as facts. Unfortunately it may be the case that, as a number of writers have suggested, the greater the degree of technical rigour employed in assessing the impact of policy, the more likely it is that the net effects will be found to be zero. (Rossi and Freeman, 1985) This might provide an (albeit cynical) clue to the reasons for the alleged lack of rigour in much educational research; if rigour would simply permit us to demonstrate that our work had no discernible impact on anything, we should perhaps be foolish to pursue our research in any but the sloppiest manner possible. Less cynically, one might suggest that the marked preference for exclusively qualitative methods in continuing education research, whilst providing us with many valuable insights, has left the field unbalanced and unnecessarily difficult to defend and promote in policy terms.

Policy researchers in continuing education often find themselves working backwards in experimental terms. They may start by considering a current situation — the 'results' of policy — and use this as a basis for discovering the original aims of a policy initiative, the extent to which it has been 'successfully' implemented, and what its effects have been. They are thus piecing together the theory of the policy, which may not be congruent with their own theoretical perspective, and the processes involved in implementation, on the basis of evidence which is likely to be both highly subjective and incomplete. At the same time they must maintain their own theoretical perspective in order to evaluate both the theory and the processes involved; they are therefore frequently working on two levels simultaneously. To give the problem a more sophisticated formulation, they probably wouldn't have decided to go there in the first place (if 'there' can be identified at all), but if they had, they wouldn't have started from here. This naturally magnifies the usual difficulties of inferring causality between policy and outcomes, identifying the 'slippage between planning and implementation' (Chen, 1990 p. 56), distinguishing specific conditions for outcomes, and the perennially-vexed question of measurement, to several times their normal size.

Methodological problems, of which those cited here are only examples, might be seen as a mere irritation or even an irrelevance if policy were simply an abstraction and of interest only to a small and obscure group of academics; one could argue and theorise indefinitely without ever impinging on the lives of others, or indeed reaching even the most tentative of conclusions. However, academics in continuing education actually engage continually in debates with others about whether and why particular policies should be adopted, retained or discontinued, and how they should be implemented. Policy decisions about continuing education, whether they are taken at an institutional, a national or an international level, must eventually have tangible consequences for individuals and for social groups, and this is presumably one of the reasons why we bother to argue about them.

One response to methodological despair is to point out, with some justification, that research is only as sound as the theory behind it. The problem here is that, regardless of whether the researcher's theory will withstand scrutiny, it may not be the only theory applied to the research findings. Research about policy always has at least a dual function: it helps to inform our own arguments about which policy initiatives are likely to produce particular outcomes, but it also provides policy-makers and other interested parties with evidence about the utility and social consequences of particular educational initiatives. The researcher may have very little control over the uses to which his or her work is put; and this is where questions of morality and political expediency begin to loom large, both for the researcher and for the subjects of research. These are of course not new questions, either in education (e.g. Finch, 1986) or in social science in general (Becker, 1967 and countless others since), but one could argue that they require further consideration in continuing education, a field of policy in which the bases and processes of formulation and implementation have been only partially explored, and are now being transformed.

A practitioner colleague recently commented on a draft paper of mine concerning policy issues: 'Don't ask questions to which you don't want to know the answers'. This defensive and expedient view was perhaps illustrative of a common problem. I did indeed want to know the answers, but whatever they turned out to be, they could have no consequences for me other than intellectual ones; a minor revision of my *Weltanschauung*, or an interesting new angle on my research, perhaps. But for others — practitioners, managers, students, institutions — the answers, depending on how they were interpreted and utilised, could have far-reaching consequences which might be neither predictable nor necessarily positive. Of course it might be argued that to imagine one's research will have any consequences at all is either narcissistic or naive, or both; Booth's avuncular advice is that '... while it is right for [policy researchers] to believe in the value of what they do it is arrogance to have too much faith in its importance' (Booth, 1988 p. 253). Clearly it is possible that no-one will read one's work — but perhaps John Patten will, and his interpretation of it may differ markedly from one's own. Finch cites the example of a researcher, a supporter of comprehensive schooling, being discomfited to hear her work being cited on a radio programme by Brian Cox as evidence that educational selection should be retained (Finch, 1986 p213); the meaning attributed to research findings is clearly at least partially dependent upon the ideological stance of those who use them. It is therefore equally naive to attribute so little practical significance to one's work that the range of possible consequences is ignored. The choice for the researcher is to abandon the issue on the grounds that some questions are best left unasked, or to take the risk of asking the question in the hope that the 'answering' process may ultimately have positive consequences, either in terms of a clearer understanding of the consequences of educational processes (better theory), or in the form of improved educational provision (better practice).

Questions about the power relations between researchers and their subjects, accountability in research and the possibility or desirability of 'ethical neutrality' have exercised the minds of social scientists for many years. Two of the roles commonly adopted by continuing education researchers as a means of dealing with some of these questions are those of the advocate or of the committed and active participant; these roles may feel more comfortable to the researcher than the adoption of a spurious neutrality, particularly since educational research, unlike much social science research, is frequently carried out by practitioners themselves. They may also help the researcher to avoid uncooperative responses from wary or vulnerable subjects — and in policy research the subjects may also be practitioners or other 'stakeholders' in the policy process, who perhaps have good reason to be wary. However the adoption of such a role clearly raises a number of political, ethical and indeed epistemological problems; in extreme cases it may give rise to 'the danger of becoming excessively committed to a 'cause' to the point where integrity is abandoned for the blind pursuit of an obsession' (Heller, 1986 p. 15). A more common and less extreme scenario is that the researcher's explicitly partisan stance sanctions a selectivity in the use, manipulation and interpretation of data which can be sufficient to cast considerable doubt on the validity and applicability of the research, although the researcher's 'integrity' remains intact.

This approach rarely throws up any unpalatable answers; that is not what it is intended to do. It is therefore more likely to confirm than to challenge the researcher's own theoretical framework, which in turn can lead to unhealthy professional entrenchment. This leaves continuing education in a weak position when its practices and professional wisdom are subjected to unsympathetic or even hostile interrogation, as has been happening recently. It is now less easy than it once was to use a cloak of professional expertise or political purity to protect ourselves from 'inappropriate' questions about the social (or even economic!) value of our work; we are forced into a position where justifications for practice have to be provided, often in terms we consider to be inept. However, it is preferable for those of us in continuing education proactively to ask difficult and delicate questions, and to attempt to provide answers for ourselves, than to react indignantly and defensively to outsiders who have the temerity to demand answers which we do not have. The process of doing this is deeply problematic and also risky; it requires us to explore more fully the subtle distinctions between an admitted lack of neutrality and a straightforward surrender to bias, and to seek an unaccustomed distance between ourselves and our practice. A clearer and better-substantiated theoretical basis for our contributions to the policy process is necessary if our interventions are to amount to more than a pragmatic, and possibly misguided, plea for the retention and extension of that which already exists.

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Research and development issues for vocational education and training

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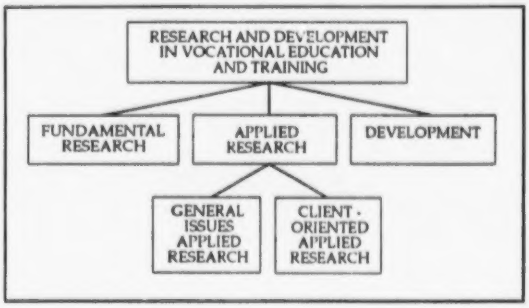
LAST year an Australia-wide government-funded project was established to provide advice in the formation of a national research and development strategy for vocational education and training. During the course of the project (McDonald *et al.* 1993) a number of basic issues emerged which are as relevant to all adult education research as they are to the specific area of vocational education. These issues are the subject of this paper.

The background

Research and development in vocational education and training in Australia has spanned a remarkably diverse range of agencies, subject disciplines and research methodologies. This diversity is both a strength and a weakness. The strength arises from the wide and rich range of perspectives that are available from the disciplinary origins of vocational education and training researchers, which include psychology, sociology, economics, labour markets, industrial relations, physical sciences, philosophy and history. This brings with it the potential to apply the different disciplinary backgrounds to research, although there are still relatively few researchers with expertise in the disciplines of economics and industrial relations. The weakness arises because there is little dialogue between researchers across subject disciplines and few cases of multidisciplinary investigation of the major issues requiring research in vocational education and training.A significant recent development is the increasing research activity in vocational education and training in some of the "new" universities. Academics in these universities, in which vocational education and training schools and departments are mostly located, are being encouraged to undertake research, and this is leading to a rapid increase in research activity in vocational education and training.The amount of research carried out, however, and the extent of its application, remain at an unsatisfactory level. Research into vocational education and training has in some ways reflected some of the problems of vocational education and training itself. Vocational education has never really been accepted as part of the education profession or as part of the economic and labour market profession, and vocational teachers and trainers are less part of the general education profession than others. Research problems arise partly from these issues, as well as the problem generally of vocational education and training generally having less 'kudos' attached to it, a problem that carries over into research.

Categories of research and development

To help us discuss the different types of research and development, we classify R&D under the following headings. Applied research is categorised as either 'general-issues-based' or 'client-specific'. Although there is sometimes some overlap it is useful to discuss them separately:


RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING
FUNDAMENTAL RESEARCH
APPLIED RESEARCH
DEVELOPMENT
GENERAL ISSUES APPLIED RESEARCH
CLIENT-ORIENTED APPLIED RESEARCH

Types of research and development

Current research expenditure

Only about half as much is spent on research in vocational education and training (as a proportion of recurrent expenditure) as is spent on research in the other sub-fields of education.

Nearly all of the funding is for problem-oriented commissioned research, and very little funding is directed to general-issues-based research or fundamental research in vocational education and training. Most resources are, in fact, allocated to development projects, particularly curriculum development at national, state or local level. Furthermore, the proportion of total funding allocated to research is extremely small. The level of expenditure on research in vocational education is low relative to education generally, and very low relative to research expenditure in other fields. This again might be related to the perceived low status of the sector compared to education and other fields.

Shortcomings in Australia's current research

Throughout the course of the project, the messages on the state of R&D in vocational education and training were clear:

a. current research is fragmented;
b. there is little fundamental and general-issues-based research in vocational education and training;
c. the research that exists is often not applied;
d. the big issues in vocational education and training need much more intensive research;
e. a strong critique of vocational education and training policies and programs is absent[1].

a. Fragmentation of current research

Current research is seen as too thinly spread over a wide range of topics, with many important issues being under-researched or not researched at all. This perception is supported by an analysis of the research literature in vocational education and training published from 1987 to 1992.

The analysis of the research literature also shows that few Australian researchers are researching each topic. In most of the areas of research seen as important, the number of researchers is seen as below the critical mass needed to make significant progress; furthermore, many researchers work on a wide range of topics over time. One likely reason for this is the high proportion of commissioned research in vocational education and training. Researchers are being funded to do research in issues or topics selected by the major commissioning bodies, and the issues or topics tend to be relevant to the commissioning organisation's short term information needs, which are prone to change from year to year.

Another significant point is that vocational education and training is the one sub-field in which universities do not have a natural claim to be doing the most or the best research.

b. Relatively little fundamental and general-issues-based research

People perceive that there is relatively little of the more fundamental and general-issues-based research—that is, research that builds theories or general understandings of issues that are applicable to a wide range of contexts—and this is supported by analysis of the relevant databases.

It is also ironic, given the direction of development in Australia, that the areas of 'Industry issues' and 'Organisation' have received considerably less attention from researchers than 'Policy and economics', 'Students and trainees', 'Teachers and trainers' and 'Curriculum'.

c. Lack of use of research

Even more of a problem than the small amount of research is the lack of application of research; there is a need to reapply the outcomes of good research conducted in the past to current issues of concern, although this will often require the adaptation of terms into today's language (see Stevenson 1992 for an elaboration of this point). There is also potential to apply some fundamental research in other fields and disciplines to vocational education and training concerns.

d. Concentrating on the 'big' issues

There was also agreement on the need to focus research resources on the 'big' issues in vocational education and training. Examples of 'big' issues that were cited include

- the economic benefits of vocational education and training,
- the relationship between workplace training and productivity
- workplace changes and their effect on vocational education and training,
- the value of competency-based training
- learning processes
- assessment of competency and key competencies.

This need is not unique to Australia. The following statement (made about one of the above issues) appears in a recent British book:

> With the imminent wide scale introduction of National Vocational Qualifications ... one might have surmised that Competency Based Learning would have assumed a prominent and important focus for research and debate in British universities. This is not the case ... Whilst there are isolated examples of CBL research undertaken by academics in some universities, this work appears to have had very little impact on outside publics. (Burke 1989)

e. The lack of a strong critique of policies and programs

Another shortcoming is the lack of a strong critique of vocational education and training policies and programs. When the Green and White papers into the structure of Australia's higher education system were released in the late 1980s, there was a flood of articles and critiques examining the proposed changes and in many cases attacking them. By comparison, the massive changes in vocational education and training over the last few years have attracted very little discussion or comment. If the changes to the sector are to be beneficial and long-lasting, there will be a need for a national debate, informed by research and theoretical perspectives, on the issues involved—no matter how uncomfortable this might be for some involved in policy formulation from time to time. The need for such a critique was seen by a wide range of people, including not only practitioners and researchers but also, significantly, senior government officials and policymakers.

The need for a strategic approach

Given the shortcomings above, we cannot help but be drawn to advocate a strategic approach, possibly at a national level. What is lacking is the planning of research in the context of national needs, for both decision-making and for the development that will need to take place to support all new directions. If resources are to be allocated to research in vocational education and training, the establishment of a strategic plan for research (and the development and dissemination of its results) will increase the likelihood of such research being well-focused and implemented.

Criteria for setting priorities

The single most important criterion voiced by participants in the project was related to the short term imperatives imposed by the changing vocational education and training agenda. That is, the fact that directions have been embarked upon which lead to enormous changes in vocational education and training has meant that prior research, which should have been essential, has been missing. Such research could provide sound guidance on both the assumptions underpinning these changes and effective ways of implementing them.

This raises a major issue of how to balance short term criteria with the longer term research needs of vocational education and training.

So far as the medium and longer term are concerned there are a range of other criteria which might guide research. In our view one of the most important of these is the extent to which research undertaken can form a foundation for further research, either extensions of it or as more applied versions of it. The reason for elevating this to such a high place is the dearth of this type of general-issues-based research in this field and the need to safeguard the quality of the inevitably increasing research effort carried out by people both inside and outside universities—in the vocational education system and in industry. We believe that this criterion would also be used to justify projects which were innovative methodologically as well as those concentrating on issues of substance.

Conclusion

This paper presents some of the results of an Australian study. However, it is likely that the results will be relevant to many English-speaking countries, many of which are at present grappling with similar issues: the role and structure of vocational education, approaches to competence, equity and access, and so on. Many issues are raised by this work, including:

- whether there should be a national strategy for R&D in vocational education, to coordinate the research effort and to reduce fragmentation;
- the role of universities in researching this area, particularly to establish research consortia and strong multidisciplinary teams, and to ensure better communication between researchers; and
- how research can make the most appropriate use of the perspectives of its ultimate stakeholders—industry and the vocational education systems.

Only when these questions are addressed will research in vocational education play its necessary role in supporting the work of this critically-important sector.

FOOTNOTE

1. Some, but not all, of these findings are similar to those of a review of educational research in Australia conducted at the same time as this project (McGaw *et al.* 1992).

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University-based adult education and the field of practice : a South African case

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1. Introduction

THE paper is an attempt to analyze the impact of changing social conditions in South Africa on the relationship between university-based adult educators and field practitioners — particularly in the area of research and study. It derives from a research project by a staff team at the University of Cape Town.[1]

The paper moves through three inter-related accounts: first of the impact of changing social conditions on a key adult education discourse — the practice of adult basic education/literacy; second, of the role of university-based adult educators in engagement with the field of practice stabilized by apartheid conditions; third, of the demands new social and political conditions place on adult educators in university locations.

The wide-angle lens treatment required by the scope of the subject will produce an abstracted and poorly textured picture — but hopefully an accurate one in its general structure and argument.

2. Social change and literacy discourse

The dramatic shift of February 1990 from enforcement of and armed opposition to white minority rule to a process of negotiation towards power sharing in a democratic constitution changes the ground rules of social policy in ways that have specific implications for the discourse of literacy. What are transformed by the process of political settlement are assessments of the social costs of illiteracy.

To deal first, in the briefest of terms, with pre-1990 conditions.

The ground rules constructed by the enforcement of apartheid were simple and bipolar: the master term was The Struggle and the protagonists were the People and the State. Under such conditions black illiteracy was not perceived as a social cost to government: indeed, it was arguably a social benefit in areas of economic competition and political advancement. The state's position created a vacuum in both policy and provision: the cost of illiteracy would have to be met — if it were to be met at all — by the illiterates themselves or by the private sector. Private sector responses were more complex but neither 'social responsibility' nor profit-related assessments justified ownership of the problem under conditions of economic recession and burgeoning numbers of unemployed black school leavers.

The social costs of illiteracy for community-based organizations working under repressive conditions in opposition to the state were very differently perceived. Engagement by donor-funded voluntary literacy organizations exploited the provision vacuum, with philanthropic intent or in a collective project of organizing and mobilizing for social change. Such work though limited in scale had the highest symbolic value and constructed the intellectual terms and commitments of the field of literacy practice.

The negotiation of a democratic constitution by the major political and economic actors displaces the grounding narrative of The Struggle. The new narratives — of Reconstruction and Development — are those of civic inclusion and of state responsibility to all so included. The social costs of illiteracy in this new South African nation — with an estimate of 10 to 15 million black adult illiterates — are transformed. Illiteracy becomes a political problem of social stability for the new democratizing state; a development problem for the economy reconstructed through new forms of co-operation between capital and labour. Three powerful new stakeholders register — through a range of inter-related considerations — the social costs of illiteracy.[2]

This new 'ownership' carries with it a transformed evaluation of the illiteracy problem — from a totalized even mythologized condition of need constructed by oppression and resistance, to *specific* forms of social disadvantage and disqualification. These are open to new and competing criteria for prioritization with a consequent differentiation of ABE/literacy provision across a range of sites.

The practical consequences of such recognition are dramatic, especially for the field of community-based practitioners who have carried the symbolic and intellectual leadership of the field:

- massive inflows of donor funding into literacy and ABE development, with institutionalizing intent.
- pressure to transform the scale of ABE operation and provision.
- pressure for national ABE policy and pro-

vision as a responsibility of the new state.

- ambitious blueprints for national ABE systems that reflect new areas of co-operation and consensus between labour and capital.
- a discourse of exchange value, equivalency and articulation across systems — of securing the terms and functions of ABE engagement as political and economic settlement — with little interest in the curriculum that provides educational content or the educational vision of practitioners.

These then typify the changed 'field conditions' university-based adult educators have to engage with. I turn now to their capacity for doing so.

3. University-based adult educators and the ABE/literacy field: conditions of the eighties

University-based adult educators in South Africa in the eighties — in very small departments and subdepartments concentrated (with one exception) in the traditionally white, liberal, 'open' universities — made their major contribution to ABE development through affiliative engagement with and service to the field of practice constructed by community organizations in opposition to the apartheid state. I shall label this as work in 'informal-consultative mode'.

Their work in what could be called 'formal-institutional mode' — the formalizing and professionalizing of the field of practice through training and certification — was by contrast small-scale, anticipatory and ambivalent, this despite excellent innovative programmes. The ambivalence is to be seen in a reluctance to use the university system to construct a hierarchy of professional qualifications for adult educators and in the project nature of innovative programmes for the field — both directly related to the absence of state funding.

Similarly, their work in 'public-intellectual mode' — contribution to the field by free-standing, critical research and study, work that shifts the terms of public policy debate and professional curriculum, and in which the university exercises most explicitly its authorizing capacity — was largely displaced by the priority of direct service and support to the field. The concern of the paper is the tension between an agenda of service and responsibility to a field of committed practice and one that can no longer be authorized by prioritizing practitioner interests. This requires a brief account of the work of university-based adult educators in the service mode typical of the eighties.

While traditional Afrikaans medium universities were substantially insulated against the calls and pressure of the liberation movement in the eighties, the position of the 'open' universities was more complex and ambiguous. Structurally, universities could be seen as having no contribution to make to a counter-culture of mass mobilization and organization for social transformation. In their bureaucratic functions it was business as usual for these universities — in common with others — though the business was more anxiously conducted.

In their informal-consultative function, however, the situation was very different. The political irrelevance of the university as formal structure, the harsh state repression of the liberation movement and the international academic boycott, propelled two forms of response by university intellectuals: private alliances with and engagements in sectors of the popular movement, and organizational initiatives within the university, usually on its fringes, to mediate resources to organizations of the movement.

Such initiatives took a variety of forms: resource centers, university extension projects and programmes, education policy units, non-formal training programmes and ways of popularizing academic work through new forms of media development. The common thrust was mediation of university resources within newly constructed sites of political and cultural relevance; the social gains were the repossession of ideological authority and a renewed sense of political relevance. Many such university-based agencies drew members of the 'community' into contract posts and attempted to conduct themselves as community organizations with the university as their 'site' of work rather than their organizational home.

Under such conditions radical adult education discourse provided the narrative of The Struggle with the positive terms of the *educational* contestation between People and State: non-formal, empowering, popular, democratic, conscientizing, counter-hegemonic. University-based adult educators — in contrast to academics in mainstream education departments servicing the schooling system — found their field of practice authorized by The Struggle — as alternative education with the capacity for social transformation. They operated with considerable legitimacy in the project world of small organizations with a field of practice lying between educational and organizational work — a field that maximized their process and strategic skills. Such engagement ensured the flow of donor funding into university departments of adult education: they were resourced, in fact, through demonstrated distance from the university. Research in public-intellectual mode, by contrast, was thwarted or displaced by the immediacy of issues and the pressure of practitioner needs. No coherent research programmes were developed within or across university departments. Such research as there was prioritized experience and engagement with the field through action research, case studies and project evaluation, valorizing the theory-making nature of the project world. And it became difficult for university-based adult educators to conceive of a programme of intellectual work driven by basic theoretical questions that could itself serve as a major contribution to social reconstruction.

4. Research demands of the nineties

We face the challenge of the nineties, then, overprepared for a role of service to the field. The new demands address themselves precisely to our points of weakness — large-scale institutional structuring of professional practice and the production of intellectual work incisive enough both to contribute moral and intellectual grounding for this practice and, even more urgently, to impact the construction of national policy.

In the field of adult basic education the major research task lies in the demythologizing of the literacy discourse — a project that could be perceived as actually undermining practitioner interests and commitments. We have a particular responsibility in this matter. Universities have not simply shared in maintaining the mythological character of this discourse, they have been major beneficiaries of the process. They have co-operated through their espousal of progressive practices and methodologies to the very programmatic assumptions that short-circuit understanding of relations between need and provision. And they have no tradition of ethnographic research to draw on that could prioritize the practices of learners against the plans of practitioners.

This is a new and difficult way to be part of the solution by reconceptualization of the problem, but it is a task that only universities have the institutional mission and the theoretical resources to undertake, even if only potentially at this stage.

In the key area of policy studies university-based adult educators are having to gain with indecent haste the comparative perspectives and the bureaucratic stance required to engage in fundamental design and development work on a national scale — including the legal, fiscal and institutional aspects of system planning. We have also to begin to grasp the technological implications of any responsive system of adult education provision in a country of 40 million people with extremely diverse social and linguistic backgrounds. There are many tasks for different agencies enacting adult education as a narrative of development and of redress in the emerging South Africa. Universities will serve this collective enterprise best by identifying those that are their particular and unique responsibility. What the new conditions of the nineties offer the universities is a fresh opportunity to demonstrate their relevance to the construction of adult education policy and practice. We hope that this will be a project that will engage international participation.

FOOTNOTES

[1] I acknowledge the key contributions of my colleagues, Tony Morphet and Mastin Prinsloo, to the ideas developed in this paper.

[2] However, it must be said that all this is happening under what might sadly be our version of a Prague Spring. The narrative of The Struggle remains leashed pending a satisfactory distribution of power and consequent delivery of social goods through economic development.

The politics of research: taking sides

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IN conducting research there are researchers for whom taking sides may not be a big problem; they may have no choice and so are resigned to this fact. For others who have decided that working for the organisations they do, this may not be a problem, e.g. those who work for a trade union or a pressure group. However, not all researchers have such experiences. For the majority the question of taking sides is crucial. The market place now is much more competitive and grant bodies are in a more powerful position to choose to whom to allocate the funds.

Given this, what does a researcher do when faced with making an application for a researcher grant? What questions need to be asked when tendering for research funds?

Why is the research to be conducted? This raises the issues of what outcomes are sought and who is to benefit from the outcomes. Does the researcher tender for a project knowing their results will be used to further a political cause? If the answer is yes, then does s/he tender in the belief that it is possible to influence the outcome by using a methodology that will ensure the desired outcome? In pursuing this course of action will the researcher jeopardise the reputation of his or her institution or personal professional reputation? This a dilemma that I want to discuss by an illustration of a case study.

Two years ago I was involved in drafting a bid to conduct research into the training needs of minority ethnic and refugee communities in North London. The research was to be funded by the local Training Enterprise Council (TEC) which was at the time was in the process of setting itself up. The objectives were to produce a profile of these communities and provide a snapshot of their existing skills and their training needs; included in the latter was the type of work they hoped to secure. The results of the research were to be used by the TEC to plan the allocation of employment training funds to training providers, the assumption being that a market existed which training providers would need to meet if they were to receive funds from the TEC. The methodology on which the TEC representative was keen included desk research to draw up a profile, interviews with community groups and staff from a local further education college and getting members from the communities to complete training needs analysis questionnaires which were distributed to community groups, training providers and at job centres.

Although the aim was the identification of the training needs of these communities the assumption behind this was that it was these communities who needed to take the initiative in order to train to secure employment. The practices and the polices of training providers were not examined to identify any positive practices (apart from an interview conducted with a careers officer in one further education college). This is not to assume that all minority ethnic and refugee communities are homogenous; their needs depend on their emergence as a community within different contexts.

The reason for conducting this work was to establish a working relationship with the local TEC, so that in the future it would place my organisation in a strong position to bid successfully for contracts. Equally important for the values of my organisation was that it provided a service to the local community.

While I could see the logic of this it was difficult to explain to the TEC at the time that doing no more than examining these communities would provide a one-dimensional view of the situation. Moreover, government-sponsored employment training courses are reputed to be of poor quality and examining the practices of training providers in the TEC region may (perhaps) reveal some good practices. When I suggested that it might be fruitful to ask training providers what procedures or systems they had to monitor the quality of their provision, I was met with the stern reply that it was not a relevant issue as far as the project was concerned.

On a political level I see such courses as being designed to keep the reserved pool of labour off the employment register — a form of social control. Given that I decided to work on the Project, did I have to take sides? If yes, whose side?

If I took 'no side', then I would be providing the funding institution with the outcome it desired, i.e. the institution would be buying an outcome suited to its policy requirement. It was not possible to restructure the methodology as this was contractually agreed. If I took the side of the researched or the 'subordinates' (Becker, 1966), how could I influence the outcome? From Becker's assertion, if I sympathised with the researched would it distort the research?

Most minority ethnic communities and refugee groups have been the subject of research to varying degrees, and their needs and experiences are well documented (not to assume that their needs don't change); however the practices of service providers have not always met their demands, even where 'equal opportunity' policies exist. Furthermore, I found that in discussions with representatives from these communities that such issues as access to training courses which recognised their existing qualifications from abroad, language support and institutional racism had been raised before with training providers, with little progress.

The final report was to be presented to the Board members of the TEC and I explored the idea of inviting representatives from the community groups to this session; however this was not seen as practical at the time by the representative from the TEC. The Board members were not in a position at the time to have any form of dialogue with community representatives. Another reason given was that it was not clear to what extent these individuals were representative of the communities from which they came. At the final meeting of the project I was given less than ten minutes to answer questions from the Board. None of the questions related to the concerns of the community groups but rather related to their existing skills and to the types of employment they were seeking.

In another case, which contrasts with the one above, I was approached by a voluntary group who were concerned that the youth from one of the minority ethnic communities did not have all their social and training (for employment) needs met in one London borough. I agreed to conduct the work as I sympathised with the aims and objectives of the research and also with some of the political views of the voluntary group. The research was funded by the local council, who had a representative on the project steering group, and in addition there were members from the minority group who whose needs were the subject of the research; the latter formed the majority on the steering group. The methodology was to interview youth workers, other voluntary organisations and those in the council responsible for planning youth provision. A sample of youth was to be interviewed at youth clubs and asked to complete two separate questionnaires — one on training needs analysis and the other on social needs, (i.e. access to youth clubs, guidance for personal problems, etc.)

As I was having problems arranging meetings with the youth the completion date was extended and I passed on new information to members of the project steering committee as the interviews progressed.

In the course of the interviews with the youth I found out that they would prefer to have their own youth facilities rather than use the existing youth centres, which they found limiting, and more importantly they wanted to manage these facilities themselves rather than having other voluntary groups manage these services. When I mentioned this to one of the members of the steering group, it was suggested that I should not pay too much attention to such statements. The aim of the voluntary group was to use evidence from the research to seek more funding in order to deliver these services and develop their organisation. While this was not overtly spelt out it was an underlying assumption. At the second steering group meeting I found that this was a sensitive issue amongst some of the members. There was disagreement with the view that the youth wanted a separate organisation and it was questioned whether my sampling frame was representative of the majority. The council representative pointed out that the borough had limited funds and it would look more favourably at providing resources to an existing organisation than to those who were aiming to set up a new organisation.

While I could see the sense in this, I felt that the real needs of the youth were been marginalised. The issue was complicated by the fact that the young women wanted their own centre and did not want to share one with their male counterparts. While the female members of the steering group sympathised with this concern, their over-riding concern was to develop their own organisation.

I agreed with the stated aim of the voluntary group — that the needs of the youth from this minority ethnic group had to be met — but the question for me was whether this group should be responsible for providing them. Given the limited funds available, would a research report indicating a strong desire amongst those researched for a separate centre mean that they would receive no funding at all? After all, the council was in financial difficulties; could it meet such a demand? The steering group asked me to consider these issues in drawing up the draft of the final report, the underlying message being that I should be selective with the evidence I had gathered. Here while I was in sympathy with the objectives of the project and could see that the sponsor was in a better position to secure funding, I could not ignore the results of my evidence. An easy way out would be to write a report as the Project Steering Group wished; this would also mean that in the future I might get additional work or would be recommended to other organisations in a positive light.

Before drawing up the final report, I felt that a way forward would be to arrange a meeting between the steering group and a sample of the youth. To my surprise, the project steering group agreed, and at the meeting although the issue of a separate centre was not settled it became apparent to some of the steering group members that the issue aroused strong feelings. The majority of steering group members agreed that the final report should contain all the evidence I had gathered.

In both the above cases taking sides has its difficulties. In the former case, while I disagreed with the sponsor and sympathised with the researched, there was little I could do to influence the outcome. In the latter case, while I agreed with the objectives of the research and on the face of it thought it would be a straightforward project, I had to take sides in the end. I don't believe that in taking sides I have distorted the research.

There are other issues that may influence decisions on taking sides. Both the above projects were short term, and the room for influence is limited. However, in a long term project it may be possible to identify strategies. In trying to survive in a marketplace some values that a researcher holds dear may be compromised as institutions funding research are now more sophisticated at purchasing and manipulating outcomes (see Armstrong in this volume). In taking sides we need to ask why we work in education. Is it that some of us believe in social transformation?

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When the chips are down: the miners, conflict and change

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COAL mining must rank among the most researched of all industries, yet surprisingly few academic studies have involved the active participation of miners. Various forms of adult education provision have provided educational opportunities specifically for miners, and an extensive programme of research has been undertaken with the involvement of participants in these programmes. This paper describes the evolution of such research over the past decade and analyses the complex relationships this has entailed between students and tutors, between teaching and research.

In the early 1950s day release courses were established at Sheffield University for Derbyshire miners, and at Leeds and Sheffield Universities for Yorkshire miners, such provisions having existed at Nottingham University for Nottinghamshire miners since 1924 (Barratt-Brown, 1991). Over the years most of the leading activists in the National Union of Mineworkers were educated through the miners' day release courses; most were elected to branch positions and some, like Peter Heathfield and Arthur Scargill, became full-time officials at the highest level in the Union. Many became more active in Labour Party politics as local councillors, and some, like Kevin Barron and Mick Clapham entered Parliament as NUM-sponsored MPs. Clearly the skills developed by those who attended the extra-mural classes were being put to good use, yet the rich resource of their collective experience for many years remained untapped by the academics involved in their education.

When Wilfred Miron, former chairman of the East Midlands Division of the NCB, wrote a secret report to NCB chairman Sir Derek Ezra on the emergent left-wing leadership of the NUM in December 1973, he also made reference to the younger activists:

> In the field, at the pits, there are other young men, Marxist indoctrinated, who within the next 10-15 years will emerge as a 'new generation' augmented by student (University and Polytechnic) tuition to take the places of older men who will be retiring or moving upwards (quoted in Winterton and Winterton, 1989: 10).

Certainly at that time there *was* a left-wing network within the Union, known as the Miners' Forum, which was campaigning for more militant policies and organising support for left candidates in Union elections, but this was entirely separate from the day release provision. Although Professor Vic Allen, who had a close involvement with the Forum, was based at Leeds University, there was a tacit agreement that he would not be involved in teaching on the miners' day release course, for fear of jeopardising support for the course from the right-wing leadership of the NUM Yorkshire Area as much as from the NCB. Indeed, few of those who taught on the miners' course during Arthur Scargill's time as a student could be described as left-wingers, and certainly were not responsible for his indoctrination!

During the 1980s this pattern was to change, when a group of academics based at Bradford University (the Working Environment Research Group) came together to investigate the impact of new technology on the mining industry (Winterton, 1993a). During teaching sessions on the Miners' Day Release course at Leeds University it became obvious, in discussion with students, that a profound change was taking place in the labour process as a direct result of the application of microelectronics. The group developed a framework of analysis which initially focused on four major substantive issues: potential job loss; changing content of work; job control and health and safety. These were all issues that had been identified by students on the miners' course as major areas of concern. Throughout the whole investigation, information on the development of new coal technologies and their impact on the working environment were continually being fed back to the group by the miners. Such action research represents a process of empowerment, both for the miners who influenced the direction of the research, and for the researchers whose work attains a new legitimacy (Winterton, 1993b).

This close partnership resulted in two major reports being commissioned by the NUM national executive (Burns et al, 1983; 1985) outlining a dramatic reduction in employment in the coal industry. These publications were dismissed by the NCB as "alarmist ... building a myth out of nothing", and "politically-motivated mischief". The NUM, on the other hand, who had not always experienced an easy relationship with academics in the past, responded positively to these reports, after the group had presented their conclusions to the Grading and Technology Sub-Committee and to the full National Executive Committee of the NUM. Unknown to the group, the job loss projections concurred with information that had been obtained by the NUM from independent sources in the NCB.

The predictions exceeded the miners' worst fears and generated some interest amongst the local authorities, who became increasingly concerned with the impact that the potential job losses could have on the local economy. West Yorkshire County Council requested from us a report which specifically focused on the job implications of NCB restructuring policies for West Yorkshire. The West Yorkshire report (Winterton and Winterton, 1985) gave an overview of the national dimensions of restructuring and the underlying processes involved and emphasised the unevenness of the restructuring between and within areas. Our pit by pit analysis of West Yorkshire collieries was undertaken with branch officials providing recent operating results and Yorkshire Area NUM granting access to consultative committee minutes. The report predicted the imminent closure of over half of the pits then operating in the area; out of 21 collieries in 1985, only three are left and two of these will be closed before 1995.

There proved to be little time to develop with the miners a strategy for coping with the pressures exerted by the restructuring, as had been the original intention of the technology assessment. Towards the end of 1983, it was clear that a major confrontation was imminent. Contacts had been made in the union at all levels and in all areas during the build-up to the 1984-85 miners' strike through the Miners' Day Release Programme in the Department of Adult Continuing Education at Leeds University and through my work at Northern College (a residential adult education college for trade union and community activists) which is situated near Barnsley, in the heart of the Yorkshire coalfield. The college had a close relationship with the NUM and the Yorkshire Area, providing an educational programme involving five-week block release programmes and numerous weekend and day schools.

Three months before the strike began in March 1984, we planned to study the conflict in detail, anticipating a protracted stoppage, although not one lasting twelve months! From bases in South and West Yorkshire it was possible to monitor developments at pit area and national level. Hours were spent in area strike centres, union headquarters and at the picket lines, interviewing and observing. We attended meetings of rank and file strikers and were given access to all records of the union's strike committees. Our involvement was not just as academic observers; it is impossible to maintain a detachment from the hardship and struggle of friends fighting for the survival of a way of life and the right to secure employment. We were accepted as 'honorary' members of the mining community, included in various community events and activities, and introduced as members of the mining group, not as academics. There was some reticence on the part of NUM full-time officials to sanction our study and it was our own network of day-release miners who assisted us in the distribution and collection of the questionnaires that formed an integral part of our study. These miners vouched for our integrity and our support of the case for coal and assured respondents that the information provided by the miners and their families would not be misused. Within six months of the end of the strike, detailed semi-structured interviews with key respondents at all 57 collieries then operating in Yorkshire had been collected, and almost 2,000 questionnaires had been completed by men and women who were active in the strike at local level. This unique set of data could not have been collected without the support and assistance of former students. The study subsequently published as *Coal Crisis and Conflict* outlined the origins of the strike, its mobilisation, organisation and maintenance through the eyes of its main actors, the miners and their families; it also began to analyse the aftermath of the miners' defeat.

Having completed a study of such a significant conflict (the most dramatic since the 1926 General Strike and Lockout), it was almost by habit that we continued to assess the changes that followed, tracing the emerging pattern of industrial relations in British Coal and contrasting this with developments in other state and privatized corporations (Winterton and Winterton, 1993b). Since 1985 we have been analysing the processes of restructuring in the coal industry, work which provided important theoretical insights applied in studies of restructuring in other industries, here and in New Zealand. The analysis of restructuring entails a continuous refinement of projections to take account of changing circumstances, both external (e.g. imported coal, gas-fired power stations) and internal (e.g. productivity, costs, reserves). This work was of great interest to the Coalfield Communities Campaign and local authorities in the mining areas. As a result, in the past seven years, we have presented evidence to nine committees in the Commons and Lords, to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission and to a European Parliament Public Inquiry. The Working Environment Research Group was disbanded as members moved to different institutions, and in its place the Work Organisation Research Unit was established, which continues to draw upon a network of day-release activists.

Since the 1984-85 strike, the industry has been transformed: almost 80 per cent of former annual output is now achieved with 22 per cent of the previous workforce, and productivity has increased by 147 per cent. Colliery closures, at the root of the 1984-85 strike, continued apace, providing opportunities for action research in the preparation of cases for individual pits coming before the Independent Review Body. Out of 170 mines producing before the strike in March 1984, only 51 were still operational by last October, when the Government proposed to close 31 of these. This latest crisis stimulated further work on strategic implications, especially the waste of physical, human and capital resources and the effects on security of energy supply (Winterton and Winterton, 1992). We were involved in preparing an economic case for one of the collieries, Markham Main, threatened with closure (Winterton and Winterton, 1993a). Our report on the economic viability of the pit was produced through discussion with branch officials, activists and the utilisation of NUM documentation, especially the mining engineer's report which predicted a viable future for the pit; its closure was confirmed on 30 April.

In conclusion, just as the miners' work place continually changes with the advance (or nowadays retreat) of the coal face, so the focus of coal research has changed. From investigating the structural patterns of strikes, concern moved to the effects of new technologies, to the processes of a major strike, to restructuring and new patterns of industrial relations, and then to energy policy. Coincident with this change of focus has been the attrition of the Miners' Day Release programme at Leeds and Sheffield Universities, and of the NUM courses held at Northern College. The network of respondents has grown beyond the UK to include academics and practitioners from France, the USA, Australia and China. Nevertheless, the locus of research has remained relatively constant, and the collaborative approach adopted from the outset, involving the subjects in the research process, has continued to ensure its contemporary relevance.

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6. Relationships with the researched

Introduction by Paul Armstrong
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THIS year, 1993, is the 25th anniversary of the Becker-Gouldner debate on values in research. In August 1966, Howard Becker took a major step forward in reflecting on research by claiming that the issue is not whether researchers 'should take sides, since we inevitably will, but rather whose side are we on?'. Less than two years later, Alvin Gouldner published his seminal paper on *The Sociologist as Partisan.* It was he himself who five years earlier than Becker attacked the dominant ideological myth of value-freedom. Becker's statement made Gouldner aware that the attack on one myth was merely to replace it with another — the rejection of value-freedom, and that Becker was voicing the opinions of a growing number of sociologists, particularly from within the sociology of crime and deviancy. We were now on the side of drug addicts, jazz musicians, 'nuts, sluts and perverts', or the side of the underdog, those more sinned against than sinning. Sentiment and sympathy had replaced detachment and objectivity. Mere romanticism, an obsession with the quaint, said Gouldner. By not answering his own question, Becker had missed the point. The issue was not so much to do with values as with ideology and power. Subordination to the research process was raised but quickly pushed aside because it contained too many paradoxes and contradictions that the liberal world of the mid-1960s preferred not to confront. As Gouldner recognised, value commitment is not merely an inescapable fact of nature, but is a necessary condition of objectivity. He believed that researchers must be committed to values.

One wonders just how many undergraduate essays have been written about this debate. The issue for the researcher is not whose side are we on — Becker or Gouldner? — but rather it is a practical issue. How does this debate about commitment to values affect our research practice, from the selection of the research topic, the methodology, the subjects of the research (or are they objects?), to writing up the report and disseminating (or suppressing) findings?. Whilst the central question is the relationship with the researched, the debate is broader than this, and interlinks with considerations about the purpose or kind of research (academic or applied?, exploratory or evaluative?, and so on) that is being undertaken, and for whose benefit. Whatever else we may say publicly, a substantial amount of research undertaken serves the purposes of researchers, not the researched. Career development through academic certification (M.Ed.s, Ph.D.s, etc.), and promotion based on publications ensure that research has both primary and secondary purposes. Sponsors of research also play a significant role in determining the relationship between the researcher and the researched, as Kirit Patel's paper in another section indicates. But mostly researchers still feel that there is some flexibility and freedom in negotiating a role for the researched. Since the 1970s, participatory, empowering, collaborative, transformative, emancipatory styles of research have grown in acceptability, as the papers by Kate Day and Joanne Highton reflect. More conventional approaches to research, including evaluation, have become democratised. Democratic evaluation, for example, as Shuttleworth's and Lawrence's papers illustrate, has been popularised and rescued from the mainstream.

This set of papers reflects a more recent history in the relationship between the researcher and the researched. By focusing on the dynamic, interactive and reciprocal aspects of the relationship, examining issues of power, status and ownership, the most significant influence is not the ageing Becker-Gouldner debate, but the feminist perspective on research, which since Ann Oakley's influential work on interviewing women has done more for the practical application of sharing and co-operating in the research process than the more masculine debate about objectivity and value-freedom.

Access course feedback: the interactive effects of research

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Overview of the research

OUR collaborative research concerns the monitoring of an established Access Course, run jointly by the University of Edinburgh and Stevenson College, for entry to university studies in the arts and social sciences. The original focus of the monitoring project, which was additional to routine course evaluation, was to explore the effectiveness of the transitional nature of the course. How well was it preparing adult returners from various backgrounds for what they would experience as undergraduates — academically and otherwise? Undergraduate discontinuation rates and course results were crude measures and other information was anecdotal. We thus wanted to take a closer look at the workings of the course from the student perspective, and also to test the viability of tracking the experiences of access-route undergraduates. The aim was to clarify the strengths and weaknesses of the Access Course and so generate information and ideas useful to its further development. We went into the research enthusiastically. JH welcomed the opportunity to learn more about doing research, especially if the course which was her mainstream responsibility would thereby benefit. For KD it was a chance to re-engage in practical research in an interesting area. But we were rather less well placed as regards resources and clearly the work would be done in marginal time.*

In October 1990, the twenty-six students from the '89-'90 Access Course cohort about to embark on studying at Edinburgh were invited to a reunion meeting. Twenty-three attended and filled out a self-description sheet indicating how, on a number of dimensions, they had changed during the access year. They also took away for completion a background information sheet and quite a lengthy questionnaire, which looked back over the course and took stock of their current intentions and expectations. In January '91, the students were invited back to share and discuss the pilot phase findings, which were more widely disseminated in March at an Access-Related Research Forum. The main research phase involved the '91-'92 Access course cohort (n=73). In November '91 we briefed students on the monitoring project and gave out a somewhat shorter questionnaire (Q1). Queries included reasons for taking the course, any off-putting factors, family and friends' attitudes, outside responsibilities, financial concerns, confidence in academic skills, time spent, sources of help and support, likes and dislikes about the course so far. 68% of students responded (13/25 men, 37/48 women). In February '92 a probe questionnaire sent to selected Directors of Studies asked about the preparedness of former Access Course students for university study and any particular strengths or difficulties. The second student questionnaire (Q2) was administered in May '92. It asked about workloads over the two terms, reactions to coursework extensions, availability of books, self-assessment capabilities, plus their two chosen subjects. The response rate dropped slightly to 63% (14 men, 31 women). The same self-description sheet used in the pilot was distributed in October '92 and produced thirty-five replies.

Introduction to the paper

We wish to discuss the interactive effects of the research just outlined. This is not altogether easy because our research was only one of several sources of information about a course which views teaching and learning as a joint enterprise and so encourages open communication amongst all concerned. Our findings were thus set alongside and triangulated with what was already coming through from students, staff tutors and external examiners. Nevertheless, this research did exert specific influences which affected what happened on the course, the nature of the student experience and us as researchers. At the same time as the research was having an impact on the inter-connected web of course structures and processes, the learning opportunities available to students, and the confidence and commitment of staff as managers and teachers, the research was itself also being shaped. It is this dynamic and reciprocal relationship between research, the researchers and the researched that will now be illustrated.

Course design and development

A. The focus in all three questionnaires on students' workload and acquisition of academic skills, and in the self-description sheets on the personal impact of the course, arose from concerns central to the transition function of the Access Course. How appropriately was the course managing to strike the difficult balance between, on the one hand, being sufficiently challenging and enough of a preparation for the demands of University work, and on the other hand satisfying the need of students still developing and unsure of their higher order abilities not to feel threatened and incapacitated by the amount and level of work required?

This was a live issue for actual and prospective students, the course management, and staff in the receiving institution, including Directors of Studies. And the research findings were able to give several useful pointers about relevant aspects of the student experience.

- Clusters of items from the self-description sheets showed that students perceived the course as moving them towards being more confident, ('confident'-'determined'-'clear-sighted'-'interested') and competent ('knowledgeable-'organised'-'resourceful'-'analytical'). At the same time a half felt more or much more stressed, over forty per cent more or much more anxious, and almost a quarter less or much less healthy.
- As regards the development of confidence in specific competencies and the attendant support needs, the students indicated having less confidence in the more narrowly academic tasks, such as taking exams and writing essays, and rather more in areas, such as studying on their own and reading effectively, where they could presumably draw on more transferable skills.
- In the matter of how much time per week students spent on their coursework and preparation outwith classes, the consistent finding was that for a clear majority of students the load was close to or just under the target twenty hour mark. This confirmation was both reassuring to staff running the course and advising applicants, and useful in on-course guidance.
- The workload findings were also influential in helping to determine how much writing experience was appropriate during term 1 in order to equip students for the raised expectations and specialist demands of term 2. The original sixteen short assignments had resulted in students performing well subsequently, but feeling overstretched in the first term. Halving the number of assignments led to students experiencing difficulties in meeting the second term standards and did not reduce the sense of overload. Since the amount of time actually put in by most people remained close to twenty hours, the compromise solution was to revert to giving sixteen assignments, but to require completion of only twelve. This has upped performance levels and, by allowing for choice, enhanced the course's promotion of student autonomy. The changes have also become part of the course's folk history, demonstrating responsiveness to student needs and commitment to course aims. When asked in Q2 to compare how challenging the two terms were for coping with the total workload, there was a near-even 55%/45% split in student opinion. The rating of term 2 as more challenging for 'planning out study time' and 'completing written work in time' accords well with the intended progressive nature of the course.

B. A second prime concern, which stemmed from the involvement of a number of tutors and the multidisciplinary nature of the course, was the harmonising of standards and practice so as to provide comparable sets of learning opportunities for students.

- One obvious tactic was to ask the same questions about each of the different courses, which was done in Q2. This produced rich data about the difficulty and amount of course material, presentational pace and style, the usefulness of handouts, tutor feedback and availability, whether the course was as interesting as expected and how students felt they were getting on. It was a useful check on, and sometimes provided explanations for, impressions gained by other means. The information helps receptive individuals to improve particular courses, and for newcomers it highlights 'good practice' (such as the blending of tutor input with opportunities for student participation). Knowing what subjects students took also made it possible to unpack, by means of cross-tabulations, general responses which otherwise were not very informative. A good example concerned 'access to books and other resource materials' which produced a 49% yes/49% no answer that concealed important subject variations.
- The issue of tutor feedback on student work, which was associated with efforts made to improve essay writing skills, was addressed in both Q1 and Q2. Students rated comments on scripts, the assessment grid, tutorial and individual discussion as useful. But their open-ended responses revealed that what had been intended as standard practice across the course was in some cases not happening or not working as envisaged. It became clear that students wanted but were reluctant to take up offers of individual sessions available on request, regardless of how approachable the tutor was or their desire for more feedback on intellectual development and potential. With this knowledge, JH as course coor-

dinator was in a strong position to recommend changes which included requiring the use in term 1 of the summary assessment grid (revised to encourage more explicit tutor feedback and general progress comments), and the submission part way through term 2 of brief reports on individual students. In addition, the lecture sequence in first term was halted at two strategic points for formally timetabled individual tutor-student meetings, instead of relying on informal arrangements.

Students and the research process

From the outset we wanted students as collaborators whose reactions and responses were important in helping to shape the evolution of the course and the research. Accordingly we have consciously fed findings back to them, kept them in the picture about any consequential action contemplated or taken, and been alert for signs that participation in the research process might be having detrimental rather than positive effects.

- One side benefit has been the contribution made by the research to building up a sense of involvement in the course and of continuity among Access students. They know that what they have to say is listened to and gets taken into account. They also know something of how their contemporaries and predecessors have reacted and can take comfort from realising the 'normality' of, for instance, having a very mixed bunch of reasons for doing the course, finding it difficult to make UCCA choices, worrying about finances or personal relationships, doubting whether they are 'really up to it' and considering leaving the course.
- Effects in the reverse direction resulted from our growing awareness that once people become undergraduates they want the freedom to choose whether and when to retain or shed their access identity. A further questionnaire already drawn up began to feel unduly intrusive. It was important to keep the interests of students centre stage and so, for ethical as well as pragmatic reasons, we abandoned ideas of trying to keep close tabs on their undergraduate experiences and rescoped the research.

The research process and us

The collaboration presented us each with different problems. For JH there was the tension between running the course and monitoring it, plus the danger of the technical aspects overwhelming and alienating her. For KD the project was at the periphery of formal professional responsibilities so that sustaining sufficiently close contact and doing the necessary 'busy' work was sometimes hard.

Yet there were several ways in which our different backgrounds and motivations turned out, as we had hoped, to be very productive.

- One was the welcome curb put on the temptation, which we both experienced, to pursue what was 'interesting' — from either a 'knowledge about access students' viewpoint or from a methodological perspective. The constraint operated because we effectively obliged one another to weigh up and to justify the practical costs/benefits likely to accompany particular lines of enquiry.
- A second gain was the sharing and exchange of expertise. This meant that as we grew more knowledgeable, about the course and research respectively, we became more effective in focusing and framing questions. Thus the number of areas which we failed to tap satisfactorily definitely declined and the questionnaires got shorter. They also became more collaborative in tone as we felt more able to preface specific questions with contextual information that helped respondents appreciate why certain aspects were being targetted.
- The third benefit was the holding up of mirrors to one another's practice. 'Naive' questions were not only challenging but had the effect of causing us to articulate fundamental assumptions about the course or doing research. During the construction of Q2, for example, JH wanted to include a question to gauge perceptions of 'locus of control' in the learning process. KD's attempt to link this general notion to some concrete feature of the course led to the identification of a proxy measure (the student's self rating of ability to evaluate their own written work before submission for formal assessment). But it also set JH wondering whether the course was being sufficiently proactive in fostering the development of autonomy in learning. One of the practical results was further to encourage self-help groups, and the inclusion of guided study groups as an integral part of the new evening Access Course.

In conclusion, we have certainly learned a lot — about the course, about Access students, about research and about ourselves. Even this paper's attempt to identify and trace through some of the elements within the powerful web of interactive effects has been instructive. Moreover it has been good to see the benefits which have accrued to the course and its participants as a result of the research.

**Statview on an Apple Macintosh was used for the quantitative analysis. We are grateful for the processing work done in the later stages by Mairi-Ann Cullen who is now at the Scottish Council for Research in Education.*

On the relationship between researcher and researched: in pursuit of methodological integrity, congruence and the democratisation of the research process

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THIS paper is being written as a workshop contribution for the SCUTREA conference in July 1993. Participants at that workshop will be invited to offer further illumination and critical comment on the issues raised, based on their own experience.

The paper offers an analysis of certain aspects of my recent research experience as a practitioner in the field of adult continuing education and training. The research in question comprised of 'a study of the employee roles and learning in the context of organisational change'. It was undertaken when I was employed as a local authority training officer and working with a group of women managers.

The paper explores the multi purposes of the practitioner/researcher — to influence, in this instance, the management practice of first line managers, my own practice as a trainer, and to write a Masters Degree thesis — and how these led to the development of an action research methodology (Lewin, 1947; Gill and Johnson 1991) using a variety of methods for 'data selection'. It explores how the combined roles of 'practitioner' and 'researcher' were sometimes complementary and sometimes in conflict. And it looks at questions of power, status and ownership which arose from the relationship between 'researcher' and 'researched'.

Finally the paper focuses specifically on how this relationship began to shift significantly when a 'life and work history' approach to interviewing (Dex *et al* 1991) was used as one of a number of research methods. This was only one of several 'arenas' within which they could reflect on their practice as managers and their relationship as women to the employing organisation. Its particular value was that it gave immediate access to a longitudinal perspective on the participants' formation as managers and as women which could not otherwise have been achieved within the time span of the research period. In addition, for many of the participants, it offered a valuable tool with which they could become co-researchers, using the narrative of their accounts for their own 'objective' analysis and reflection. Over time this could no doubt have been developed even further and to greater effect.

Devising an appropriate methodology

The research was located in a Local Authority where the author worked within a small team of training officers. It was undertaken in 'collaboration' (Nodie Oja and Smulyan 1989) with a group of 25 women managers of the Domiciliary Care Service, the majority of whom described themselves as 'working class'. Together, we looked at the extent to which their experience and learning 'en route' to becoming managers had adequately prepared them for the demands of the role, particularly in relation to changes in the nature of service provision following the NHS Community Care Act of 1990. It involved an ongoing evaluation of the education and training in which we were currently engaged together. These elements of the study were then set in the context of a critique of the employing organisation, whose recognition and support of them in that management role was currently limited by a perception of them as administrator/organisers as opposed to social work or management Professionals. Thus the research activity grew organically out of the author's professional practice as an educator and trainer of adults and had several key purposes.

- to improve the management of the Domiciliary Care Service
- to improve my (our) practice as educators and trainers
- to enhance the image of the managers within the organisation in order to procure the resources and support they needed to do the job adequately.
- to analyse and write about the above.

Both the purposes of the research and the values of the researcher led to the development of an action research approach.

> The key characteristic of action research past and present is collaboration, which allows for mutual understanding and consensus, democratic decision making, and common action. (Nodie Oja and Smulyan, 1989:12)

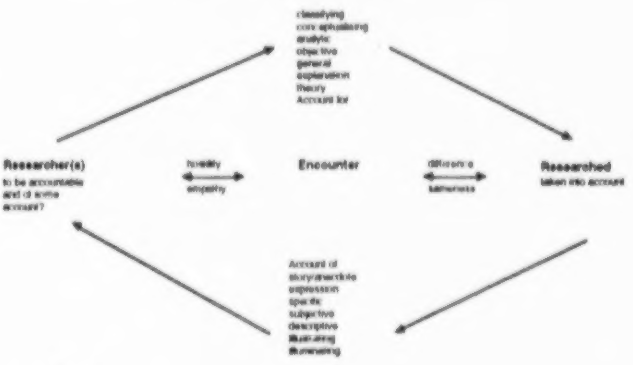
The author felt that this would be congruent with her espoused 'humanistic' values drawn from adult learning discourse (Freire, Rogers, Knowles etc) and mindful of her political commitment to anti-oppressive practice, in relation to class and gender in this instance.

Roles, status, power and ownership

The nature of the professional relationship between Training Officers and Domiciliary Care managers inevitably affected that between 'researcher' and 'researched'. However much we, as Training Officers and I, as a 'researcher' aspired to practice in an empowering 'egalitarian' vein it seemed there would always be 'unequal' aspects of that relationship which could never entirely be overcome. The theoretical models used to analyse the 'power' aspect of that relationship were drawn from Transactional Analysis (Berne, 1967), Organisational Development (Handy 1976), and from socialist/feminist discourse. Inequalities were both real and perceived. Training officers were graduates with professional qualifications. They did not have regional accents and did not originate from the local working class community as the managers did. They were also perceived as having much more influence at the centre of the organisation over issues of policy and practice although this was not always necessarily the case. 'Research' in this context was seen as a privileged, albeit useful activity. As a researcher I was more likely to persuade the managers to participate with 'my' research than would have conversely been the case. This was mainly because I was their Training Officer, and because the research and the training sometimes coincided. On the other hand the Domiciliary Care Managers had much more power over their staff and the service they managed and were possibly more influential than they realised at organisational level. The way forward, both for professional working practice and for research (practice, reflection, analysis and writing up), seemed to be by enabling one's awareness of these inequalities to actively inform both training and research methods. This involved distinguishing, at any point, the extent to which for example our experiences as women in the organisation were the same regardless of our different job descriptions, and the extent to which they were different because of our different educational and class backgrounds and because of the fixed and institutionalised difference embodied in our different professional roles.

The diagram below offers a picture of the research relationship. At the beginning of the action research process the 'researcher' is the author; the 'researched' both the organisation and the Domiciliary Care Managers.

A model of the relationship between the practitioner research and the "researched" the process of creating deeper understanding, new meaning, and better practice



Catherine Edwards
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Towards the end of the research period the relationship was beginning to shift significantly. The managers were gaining in confidence and asserting their own 'analysis' of their situation more readily. This was to some extent because, over time, the trust between them and the training team had deepened as our earlier collaborative aspirations were beginning to mature. Thus they become co-researchers, whilst what was being 'researched' remained their practice as managers, ours as trainers, and the organisation.

I will now focus specifically on the life and work history interview as a method, note some of the particular problems it threw up and explore its potential for involving participants in the analysis of the data as well as the provision of that data.

Using life and work history as a collaborative and empowering tool

> Truth is a matter of the imagination. The soundest fact may fail or prevail in the style of its telling ... If at moments the facts seem to alter with an altered voice, why then you can choose the fact you like best; yet none of them is false, and it is all one story. (Le Guin 1973)

Twenty three Domiciliary Care Managers were interviewed on their own in order to gain further insight into their individual life, work and educational histories. It was hoped that this would provide evidence about what was helping or hindering their development as effective managers. Part of the purpose was to explore whether they felt their life experiences as women had something of special value to offer their management role, and what could be done about the fact that this experience was often perceived by themselves and within the organisation as detracting from rather than enhancing their effectiveness.

The tape-recorded interviews were semi-structured in format, and were conducted in an open-ended conversational style. The influence of the perceived 'sameness' and 'difference' between us as women and as professionals affected what aspects of their 'stories' they chose to tell me and which elements of those stories I chose to give credence and significance to in the thesis. There were a number of problems inherent in this approach. As we all worked in the same organisation it was natural that we would share some of the same experiences and taken-for-granted assumptions. We were less likely to question or see the significance of these perhaps, than an external researcher (Platt, 1981). As women, there was also the danger that I would focus naturally on issues where I felt there was greater *empathy* between us and minimise those where I felt some *hostility*. For example, a minority of participants were not at all happy with the emphasis on gender and did not want to be thought of as women managers. This 'difference' was ultimately respected both in the report and in the variety of further training initiatives which emerged partly as a result of the research. But it would have been easy to have minimised this difference in my anxiety to pursue and act on the main 'thesis'.

There was also the complex issue of confidentiality. Some of the interviews contained some very personal information. I could offer assurances as a researcher that this would be treated with sensitivity and respect and that they could veto its use in writing. But as their Training Officer I could hardly forget what I had heard. In addition it was important that the rest of the training team should have access to those aspects which related to our joint work. A thorough discussion of these issues before each of the interviews, and with the training team helped establish a workable agreement for all concerned.

In spite of these problems the dialogue which developed through these interview conversations, nevertheless provided a real opportunity for reflection and analysis on their practice as managers and on their relationship as women to the organisation which genuinely enhanced that practice and their development generally. The conversational style enabled the analysis to develop through dialogue, with researcher and participant sharing ownership of that process.

Conclusions

In most kinds of qualitative research there are as many shades of the 'truth' as there are storytellers and indeed 'none of them is false and it is all one story' (Le Guin: *ibid*).

One of the ethical responsibilities of the researcher and of practitioners who aspire to 'empower', is to acknowledge this to research participants and to offer them some kind of access to the analytical process, as well as the rationale of the methodology. Thus the role of the researcher enhances that of practitioner in contributing further opportunities for reflection and learning.

My own particular conceptual framework for shaping the interview questions and subsequently the analysis of data grew initially from my experience as a woman and from knowledge of the participants' concerns from earlier work with them in the organisation. It was also amended after a number of pilot interviews, and continued to be amended each time I encountered the unexpected, the hostile and the 'different'. The thesis I wrote offers an analysis of the participants' strengths and needs as managers, of what might help or hinder their future development. The life and work history method informed that analysis. It has also provided participants with a means by which *they* can continue to reflect on and analyse their learning and practice. This can be utilised in training, supervision or peer group support. And the shape, content, and form of these 'stories' will be influenced by the context in which they are told, by the needs and purposes of the moment.

This paper emphasises that the integrity and congruence of research methodology with research purposes may always be limited by expediency and by contextual factors we do not yet have the power to overcome. In action research the best we can aspire to is to be as honest as possible about our own research stories and, when writing, to present our 'truths' as ours indeed, whilst using methods which have the potential to empower and contribute to collective understanding.

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Evaluation and accountability in the research process

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Abstract

THIS paper discusses questions about the meaning of the term evaluation in the research process, arising out of a study of Access to science students. In negotiating access to students attending an Access course in science, problems arose over the issue of confidentiality to the researched, and the usual two-way interaction in evaluation of educational performance. This conflicting mis/understanding of evaluation in research and evaluation in the educational process is explored.

Introduction

This paper arises out of a study of students attending a science Access course in which problems arose over negotiating access to the students. It is thought that some of the problems were due to differing interpretations of the term evaluation and this will be explored, but the issue of accountability and the position of the researcher and the researched versus the gatekeeper to that access is important.

First I (the researcher) will describe the study, its aims and research methods. Second, I will put the study into a political context in relation to the institution in which the main part of the study is situated, and third, I will describe the process of negotiating access and the problems which came out of this. Finally, I will discuss generally the issues and questions involved.

Aims and research methods

The study has been funded for two years (one year at a time) by the UFC. It is investigating factors making for successful access to and completion of undergraduate courses in science by mature students with particular reference to women. It focuses on the access of adult students, particularly women, to part-time undergraduate courses in science, in the context of national discussion about appropriate models for science courses in Higher Education and the entry of mature science graduates into the labour market. Because the two years of the study have been funded separately, each year can be seen as a discrete piece of research in its own right, but with obvious connecting links between them. Both qualitative and quantitative research methods have been used.

The first year of the project had three stages:

1. a national profile of some university courses providing access to undergraduate courses in science for mature students with particular attention to women.
2. a more detailed case study of the characteristics of the current student body on first year undergraduate courses in Science, and Social Science courses at the University of Brenton (the name is fictitious).
3. the recording of the process of setting up the University of Brenton Access course in Science which began in September 1992.

The second year of the project is following closely the students on the Brenton Access course in Science through their year at the University of Brenton. By comparison with students on an established Access course in Science linked with another University, the investigation aims to gain an understanding of: the effectiveness of a part-time Access course in Science as a preparation for a Science degree; and the experience of participating in such a course and its impact on lifestyle, using the following methods:

1. a questionnaire to all course participants at the beginning and end of the course.
2. in-depth interviews with a sample of course members and tutors in order to provide a series of case studies on the courses in the two institutions.

The questionnaire was structured in such a way as to enable respondents to write freely on a number of topics, but the interviews were intended as the main method of gathering data and were modelled on the methods of Glaser and Strauss (1968) in a modified form of grounded theory.

The research in context

The Science Access course at the University of Brenton evolved out of a concern, in a University which is committed to providing opportunities for mature students, to do three things. First, it was committed to furthering a developing programme of Access and foundation courses which would enable a broader range of mature students to be prepared for the rigours of part-time evening degree courses. Second, there was a desire to increase the success of a dwindling undergraduate science programme. It was felt that there was a greater need for a basic level of scientific expertise than in other disciplines to enable mature students without previous formal qualifications to participate in the science degrees being run at the University of Brenton. Third, there was a strong commitment to matching a strong scientific research programme with an equivalent degree programme in the University.

Negotiating access, issues of confidentiality and evaluation

An important part of a discussion of the research methods used in this study concern the question of access and confidentiality. It is common practice in sociological research that in order to conduct in-depth interviews the question of anonymity and confidentiality be paramount. Equally, questionnaires are usually completed so as to guarantee the respondents the same confidentiality. Consequently, questionnaires and interview tapes and transcripts (I taped the interviews which were then transcribed by a typist) are coded to preserve anonymity. Names of respondents are only used for contacting participants by post with questionnaires and for arranging interviews. Names, addresses and codes are kept and filed separately and it is considered important that respondents/participants can be absolutely sure of this confidentiality.

Problems may arise, and they did on this particular project, when the research is considered in terms of an evaluation. Having previously interviewed mostly in the area of health and health care, I was well-versed in the issues of confidentiality in the evaluative process. However, when interviewing in the educational field, the term evaluation may take on different connotations. The Chambers dictionary meaning given for the term 'evaluate' is 'to determine the value of'. This gives no indication of how this may have evolved in practice. Consequently, sociological research methods and evaluation have tended to stress the one-way confidentiality of the evaluative process, while evaluation in the educational process has become a two-way interaction between teacher/lecturer/tutor and student in evaluating each other in an open situation. As such, evaluation of educational processes in sociological research has a validity of its own. In this particular example, however, evaluation in both senses was in operation. Not only was the research being undertaken, but a separate course evaluation was being conducted by the course co-ordinator, although this was largely conducted with the use of a questionnaire.

However, classifying the evaluative process as either one- way or two-way is in itself misleading. In the sociological research process, this idea of a 'one-way' direction of information from respondent/interviewee to interviewer has been discussed and criticised extensively in the literature. The feminist literature in particular has examined the whole interviewing process in qualitative research. As I have suggested previously (Lawrence, 1987) understanding the influence of gender as a dynamic in the interviewing process is particularly important, and as such implies that the idea of a one-way process is redundant. While it could be suggested that a woman interviewing women is unproblematic, this has been shown by others not to be the case (eg Scott, 1984; Finch, 1984). And, McKee and O'Brien (1983) have shown how the female interviewer may be at some risk in the interview situation with men. While this risk may be minimal in practice it can have a considerable influence over an interviewers interviewing style. And interviewing style is crucial in building up a rapport which encourages the respondent to share personal information. Pettigrew (1981) discusses the whole issue of the 'powerful' interviewing the 'powerless', but fails to recognise the potential power of the interviewee over the interviewer. Oakley (1981) and Finch (1984) have described the instant rapport which commonly occurs in the interview situation between women, but other factors can upset this 'balance', such as gender, ethnicity, class or professional status.

There is another way in which the whole process of interviewing can be viewed as instrumental in understanding the evaluative process as either one-way or two-way. Oakley (1981) has defined the interview as a one-way process which 'objectifies' women. As she comments:

> ...when a feminist interviews women: (1) use of prescribed interviewing practice is morally indefensible; (2) general and irreconcilable contradictions at the heart of the textbook paradigm are exposed; and (3) it becomes clear that, in most cases, the goal of finding out about people through interviewing is best achieved when the relationship of interviewer and interviewee is non-hierarchical and when the interviewer is prepared to invest his or her own personal identity in the relationship (Oakley 1981).

This all suggests the importance of the interviewer/researcher in the whole interviewing process. Cicourel raised the issue of the part played by the researcher:

> Field research...is a method in which the activities of the investigator play a crucial role in the data obtained (1964).

However, as I have suggested elsewhere, the 'dynamics' of the research process continue into the analysis and writing up of research and beyond. This is an issue which has been taken up by Opie (1992) where she discusses the 'empowerment of participants on a personal and broadly therapeutic plane'. She suggests that some participants are able to reflect and re-evaluate their experience as part of the process of being interviewed. However, she also identifies the problem of appropriation in which the researcher's dominant view may subsume the participant's comments and interpret and analyse them according to their own particular representation or view. As she says:

> This is achieved through a filtering of the new (information) through the old (knowledge) so that the new is suppressed in favour of the old; and the potentially destabilising imprecate of new knowledge is subverted by a process which permits the established view to retain its dominance (Opie,1992).

It is of course important to be aware of this potential when embarking on an analysis of any data but in particular in that of qualitative research because of its implied less 'objective' nature. Opie (1992) attempts to show how a deconstruction of textual practice may bring about a reduction of appropriation. As she says:

> A deconstructive analysis requires the detailed assessing of the participant's world...The researcher... is engaged in a fluid process of identifying and questioning ideology (her own, not merely the other's), her location within the literature, the nature of her textual practice and the personal and political implications of methodology for the participants in the study (Opie, 1992).

The essence of this discussion has been to show how the idea of evaluation as either a two-way interaction in evaluation of educational performance, or a one-way research evaluation process is a false one. An extensive literature demonstrates the attempts made in the research situation to limit the one-way transmission of information into a dynamic situation between researcher and participant. And an understanding of this dynamic must be carried through into the analysis. As discussed above, the feminist literature has been particularly illuminating in examining and understanding what may be happening in the interview situation and in the evaluative/research process.

The main problems which I found arose over my obtaining access to the students and this seemed to stem from this so-called differing interpretation of evaluation by myself (the researcher) and the course co-ordinator. This occurred despite similarities in practice over the actual procedures on this occasion. It was these apparent differing interpretations of the term evaluation which led me to review and reconsider my own research practice. In reflecting on what I was doing I am able to suggest how there were differences in the two 'evaluations'. First, the evaluation of the course in the research process is one part of a broader piece of research. In essence, the research is wider than the course in that it was also discussing with students things which are not directly related to the course, but rather are about what it is like doing a course. Crucial to this are the discussions about participants' home lives and domestic situations and the impact of studying/attending a course on its equilibrium. This aspect of the research is particularly relevant to this study because the comparisons between the courses at the two institutions (one a part-time evening course, the other a full-time day course) could be expected to affect participants' domestic situations in different ways. An analysis of these differences is particularly useful for course planning and development.

This leads to questions about the need for confidentiality in the research process. While the guarantee of confidentiality to the respondents seems in opposition to evaluation in the educational process, it is apparent that for the research project overall, confidentiality is crucial in ensuring the most 'open' participation from respondents. To use the example of the discussion of their domestic situations again, experience has shown me that people are loath to expose this aspect of their lives to general view. For instance, even with a guarantee of confidentiality, it would appear that far more households have an equal or near equal domestic division of labour than is in fact the case. On probing a breakdown of who does which domestic chores it is apparent that tasks are divided for the most part along traditional gender lines (see Lawrence, 1987). This is the sort of information which would not be forthcoming without that guarantee of confidentiality.

Finally, discussions of the part of confidentiality in the research process have led me to review who it is that I am accountable to in conducting such research. The two-way evaluation in the educational process ensures that all participants in such an exercise (i.e. students and teachers/tutors) are accountable to each other. In the research situation it is the responsibility of the researcher to ensure that the data and analysis are treated in such a way as to be absolutely accountable to all who have participated in the research process (i.e. students and teachers/tutors/course co-ordinator). This can be done by ensuring that the analysis is built upon a fair representation of all the views expressed, and to bring about a reduction of appropriation (Opie, 1992).

To sum up

This paper demonstrates a number of issues about accountability in the evaluative and research process. It opens up for discussion the need to reflect on our accepted research practice. I found that I was unprepared for the reactions of the course co-ordinator to what I considered were tried and tested methods, widely used and rarely questioned. It led me to reflect on my practice in a number of ways.

The paper has discussed a number of issues and attempted to clarify an understanding of differing interpretations of evaluation in the educational and research process. The discussion has centred around the feminist literature for an analysis of the interview as a central feature of the research process. This has led to questioning the way in which ensuring confidentiality for participants in the research is effective in enabling accountability to those participants.

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Working collaboratively on research into collaborative working: I thought I saw a palindrome

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Introduction

THIS paper will offer an overview of recent debate touching on evaluation, particularly as it relates to qualitative research, and will outline work currently in progress at the University of Hull, which can be seen as an attempt to overcome some of the problems in assessing the value of qualitative research by operating within a collaborative framework. Throughout this paper, 'qualitative research' is taken to include ethnography, field research, participant observation, case study methods, and in-depth unstructured interviews, but with the recognition that while similarities of enterprise and concern exist, these terms are not completely interchangeable. However, a common approach can be identified, grounded in what might be seen as a shared aim of building understanding from 'experience, empathy and involvement' (Rist, 1984), and a view of the social world starting from the perspective of the participant. 'Evaluation' will be used in a very broad sense to include attempts to examine, judge or assess the effectiveness and adequacy of processes or outcomes of research.

The qualitative paradigm and developing evaluation criteria

After more than a decade of debate, leading contributors in the field are arguing that the qualitative paradigm in social scientific research has now achieved a legitimacy which was previously strongly contested. Hammersley (1992) for example, while perceiving this current state as problematic and as a climate of *detente* between what have been seen as opposing methodologies of quantitative and qualitative research, nevertheless has said: "*....fashion in many of the social sciences has swung from quantitative to qualitative methods. The value of the latter is now widely accepted, and in some fields there may even be the danger that qualitative work will largely supplant quantitative research.*". In many ways the current trend towards growing popularity and acceptance rests on the more concentrated attention of practicing qualitative social scientists on the need to be rigorous and systematic. In part, this focus on and argument about the desirability of 'tightening up' qualitative research can be seen within a wider research context of generalisability, research application, policy and evaluation. Some researchers are uncompromising in their views, relating this heightened focus on accountablilty to 'where the money is' (Finch, 1986), and the recognised need to satisfy research funding bodies who have been sceptical of the relevance and validity of qualitative findings. Others have taken a more general view, arguing that a common interest is inherent in the reflection of research communities on the worth of emerging and established processes and outcomes (Burgess, 1993). Argument about the usefulness of qualitative research then, has over the past decade been brought into sharper focus, and within this, the issue of evaluation and how to assess qualitative research can be seen as a key problem. I will now look more closely at some of the issues in this debate.

Hammersley offers a useful starting point in constructing a conceptual framework based on an overview of work spanning several years. He sets out potential assessment criteria around three fundamental positions:

(i) that no appropriate criteria exist to evaluate qualitative research;
(ii) that qualitative research, as an alternative approach to quantitative research, can only be evaluated by internally consistent criteria;
(iii) that quantitative and qualitative research should be evaluated by the same criteria.

The dominant perspective in the qualitative tradition is the second position, so it would be appropriate to examine contributions to this viewpoint. I will focus on four examples: Lincoln and Guba (1985), Marshall and Rossman (1989), Burgess (1993), and Hammersley (1992).

As an earlier and detailed formulation within the dominant tradition, it is worth looking at Lincoln and Guba relatively closely. They set out argument for a more accountable social science around four criteria of evaluation: firstly the notion of '*truth value*', this being the truthfulness of the findings of a particular study; secondly, the *applicability* of those findings to other settings or social groups; thirdly the *consistency* of findings, particularly in terms of their replicability; and finally, the *neutrality* of a study, or how far findings reflect the subjects and the research focus rather than researcher biases. These, according to

Lincoln and Guba, are the dimensions along which all research should be assessed; however, they go on to say that quantitative and qualitative paradigms need to make differential use of them. For the quantitative approach the dimensions relate to internal and external validity, reliability and objectivity. In the qualitative approach the dimensions are more appropriately conceptualised as constructs of ***credibility, transferability, dependability*** and ***confirmability***. This means that truth value (as an aspect of internal validity) becomes ***credibility*** which is measured in terms of accurate description and truth to the subjects studied. Applicability (as an aspect of external validity) becomes ***transferability*** or generalisability of the study to other settings, a dimension most often seen as the weakness of qualitative research, but which Lincoln and Guba argue is off-set by the strength of internal validity and its grounded conceptual frame, and additionally by triangulation, an approach growing in use as an aid to external validity. Consistency (as an aspect of reliability) becomes ***dependability***, a concept assuming a dynamic social world, an emergent research design, and therefore a problematic approach to replication. Finally, neutrality (as an aspect of objectivity) becomes ***confirmability*** which emphasises the strength of data, and the extent to which analysis is grounded in the data, rather than the objectivity of the researcher in judging the findings of a study.

Marshall and Rossman build on a range of frameworks (including Lincoln and Guba 1985; Glaser and Strauss, 1967; and Schatzman and Strauss, 1973), and suggest a number of additional criteria for assessing what they refer to as the 'value' and 'trustworthiness' of qualitative research. These include: making data collection methods explicit, and making use of data in documenting analytic constructs; the discussion of biases of personal, professional and policy related interest, and theoretical biases and assumptions; the presentation and discussion of competing hypotheses; making public the range of strategies adopted for data collection and analysis; and, documenting decisions which alter strategies or substantive focus. In addition Marshall and Rossman list potential controls as solution to the problem of researcher subjectivity, particularly as this relates to bias in interpretation of data. Their suggestions include: the use of a 'devil's advocate', which is a research partner who critically questions research analyses; a constant check for negative instances; practicing value free note taking; and conducting an audit of data collection and analytic strategies. Many of these concepts cluster around the notion of researcher ***reflexivity***, a widely used qualitative term and an important part of qualitative research strategy relating directly to the information given to the reader about the research process.

Burgess offers a slightly different framework, indicating that an evaluation of social research should examine three interconnected areas:

(i) general methodology or the principles guiding investigation,
(ii) research strategy or principles of research design and utilization,
(iii) research methods or techniques employed in an investigation.

In dealing with these general criteria of evaluation, Burgess goes on to suggest a range of questions to address, for example, how did the research begin? What theoretical perspective is employed? What principles of selection are involved? What methods of investigation are used? What form does data analysis take? What is the impact of the study? What kinds of research questions remain unanswered?

At this point it would be useful to return to Hammersley who makes what seems to be an important distinction between ***criteria*** and ***means*** — a distinction potentially useful in clarifying spheres of thinking when considering research evaluation. He argues ***criteria*** relate to the standards by which research results should be assessed, while ***means*** relate to how this might be achieved and the evidence which might be used in an assessment. Much existing work attempting to set out principles of qualitative evaluation confuses these two dimensions. A brief reading particularly of Marshall and Rossman and to some extent Burgess, goes some way to illustrate this point. Their discussion of criteria seems to draw on processes of evaluation and standards of evaluation but without explicitly distinguishing one from the other. In addition, although both Burgess, and Marshall and Rossman, discuss their outlines in terms of the evaluation of qualitative research, it might be argued when looking across the range of their identified criteria and more directly focussed questions, that they might equally hold in the assessment of any research, qualitative or quantitative.

Hammersley's own position concentrates more clearly on evaluation ***criteria***, and standards which would relate to both qualitative and quantitative research. His outline telescopes earlier frameworks into a much more simplified reformulation of criteria around two basic dimensions of evaluation — ***truth*** (or ***validity***) and ***relevance*** — both of which apply to assessments of qualitative and quantitative research. The criterion of truth or validity rests on measures of plausibility and credibility; the centrality of a claim to the argument presented; and the type of claim made, ie whether it is to do with definitions, descriptions, explanations or theories. Relevance rests on an assessment of the importance of a topic and the contribution to knowledge/literature of research findings. In addressing the 'means' or 'evidence' used to assess the presence or absence of these criteria, or their relative strength in a research study, however, Hammersley argues there may be differences according to the case and according to the qualitative or quantitative nature of a study.

Discussion so far, then, indicates that researchers differ in their views about how qualitative and quantitative research could be evaluated. Earlier formulations took the position that distinctive criteria are necessary. Developing argument is to some extent moving away from this towards a view that qualitative and quantitative criteria have dimensions in common which could indicate evaluation by the same fundamental *criteria* is possible (particularly when the framework is as concentrated as Hammersley's criteria of relevance and validity), but some reformulation of *means* might be necessary, that is how and by what evidence research is evaluated, particularly around certain issues in the qualitative paradigm for example relating to confirmability/ objectivity, and applicability/ external validity.

Linking discussion on research evaluation to evaluation policy: distinguishing evaluation criteria and evaluation means

Evaluation Criteria

In 'A Policy for Evaluating ESRC-Funded Research' (ESRC, 1992), evaluation is defined as: *retrospective assessment of research quality, contribution, rigour, impact, management and policy* (p1, 1:1), a framework which I will parallel with Hammersley's in that both offer standards to apply in evaluations of qualitative *and* quantitative research. Also, in terms of earlier discussion, it is possible to suggest these are 'criteria' of evaluation rather than 'means' — research quality, rigour and management would relate to the *validity* of a research project; while contribution, impact and policy might relate more closely to the *relevance* of a research study.

Evaluation means

The means or the actual evidence used to assess the presence, absence, or relative strength of these criteria in any research project is outlined in the ESRC policy in a number of ways depending on whether the evaluation is of a Research Project, a Research Initiative and Programme, or a Research Centre. However, in outline terms, a number of general principles relating to means are set out:

> Evaluation should be based on comprehensive and up to date evidence, and on external comment. Where selection of research publications and materials is necessary this should be done by the researchers themselves in consultation with the evaluators. Assessment should be based on peer/practitioner/policy comment and analysis of qualitative and quantitative data. The evaluation should determine whether the stated objectives, and where set, performance indicators (in the sense of attainment targets) have been achieved. (p3, 2:6).

All this is set alongside questions which assessors should ask, such as:

> Has the expenditure achieved high quality research which contributes significantly to knowledge, methodology and/or theory and which has a high utility and impact? (p3, 2:6).

It is not clear in relation to evaluation criteria and evaluation means, in this brief reading of ESRC policy how far potential differences in qualitative and quantitative research might be recognised, and the whether adequate evaluation should make use of differential dimensions of assessment. The language of the 'definition' of evaluation (in other words *criteria* outlined) appears consistent with qualitative and quantitative approaches — for example research quality, rigour and management, which I have identified as aspects of research truth or validity, are acceptable aspects of assessment for any kind of research. However, it is less clear that this is the case when considering *how* assessment will be carried out. The language here appears more positivistic and thus potentially closer to conditions of quantitativeness than qualitativeness. For example, evaluating the 'quality, rigour and management' of a research project by considering whether 'stated objectives had been achieved', might prove more problematic for qualitative approaches owing to the apparently ad hoc and necessarily more emergent nature of this than other forms of research. Similarly, in considering criteria of 'contribution and impact', and their assessment in terms of 'significance of contribution to knowledge, methodology or theory', the issue of *when* to assess might pertain differently in qualitative and quantitative terms if, as may be possible, time to absorb findings of theory and methodology occurs unevenly. Such examples, then, go some way to illustrating developing argument, that *criteria* of evaluation can be formulated in an encompassing way, but setting out the *means* whereby these criteria might be assessed is much less straight forward. Drawing on peer comment within a research community would to some extent address this difficulty. However, within the qualitative framework a further possibility accrues in relation to the established tradition of reflexivity in which researchers maintain a concern with formulating what might be termed *grounded means*, that is, in generating a formal, on-going or emergent assessment of general methodology, research strategy, and research methods. In the next section I will discuss the implications of this in relation to work in progress at the University of Hull.

Current research at the University of Hull, Industrial Studies Unit

Our research, entitled 'Worker Collaborative Research as Education', is an examination of workers' research projects in the UK and internationally in relation to theories of learning, research and education, and is an assessment of collaborative enquiry in the generation of knowledge. That is, we are interested in the educative value of the experience of working together to achieve a particular end — eg identification and solution of work based problems, policy change, or individual development — for participants labelled by us as workers and academics, from a range of education and work related backgrounds. The kind of approach adopted would therefore be research *with* workers rather than the more traditional orientation of research *for* or *on* workers. Within this structure, our research picks up on a number of points raised so far, specifically, it can be seen as an attempt to explore methodological issues alongside our primary research focus of worker collaborative research. Indeed, it was the nature of our research focus which in part triggered a broader concern with our own collective workings as a research team. Developing dimensions for us are therefore to do with *reflexivity* in the research process, and the link between reflexivity and collaboration; *collaboration as an aid to evaluation* in the cultivation of a more systematic approach; a particular orientation towards evaluation as *on-going* and emergent rather than primarily summative or formative; and finally, evaluation as *democratic* and group generated rather than essentially a matter of an external imposition.

(i) Reflexivity

The concept of reflexivity has been identified as a significant feature of the research process. Debate as to its essential qualitativeness versus its applicability to quantitative approaches has been explored elsewhere and remains unresolved. However, for our purposes, it is sufficient that there is a recognition that reflexivity is necessary to adequate research essentially because of the dimensions along which it operates. Firstly, reflexivity is to do with researchers being part of the social life they study. A central element of the concept of reflexivity, therefore, is that all social research, and social life, takes the form of participant observation in that we are participating in the social world and reflecting on the outcomes of this. Secondly, social research is reflexive in its groundedness in common sense knowledge. Thirdly, reflexivity has implications for research practice in generating an understanding of researcher effects rather than simply attempting to remove them. Finally, but most importantly for our research into the educative value of collaborative research, reflexivity has implications for the development of theory in that

> … the theories we develop to explain the behaviour of the people we study should also, where relevant, be applied to our own activities as researchers and should aid in the development of research strategies. (Hammersley, 1983).

In taking up this final point in our research, we are aiming to move towards a use of reflexivity which operates simultaneously along two levels of our enquiry: as a generative device in exploring issues and developing theory within our primary research focus of worker collaborative research and the educative value of this for participants; and as a reflective device in looking at ourselves working collaboratively as a research team, and the educative value of this for the quality of our understanding as researchers of the dimensions involved in the formulation of our practical and theoretical understanding. This approach might be termed 'heuristic reflexivity' — heuristic means to 'discover'; it requires the use of personal knowledge (Rogers,1977); tacit and always questionable assumptions, and researcher insights (Polanyi, 1983). In addition, the heuristic process is said to be about

> … understanding the essence of a phenomenon through shared reflection and enquiry with co-researchers as they also intensively experience and reflect on the phenomenon in question (Patton, 1990).

The notions of shared reflection and co-researchers thus bring us back to collaboration, and our process of working together while researching the process of others working together.

The roots of heuristics are to be found in the humanistic psychology of Maslow (1956); Rogers (1977) and Bruner (1957; 1967), whose ideas about the nature of the learning context have been linked to concepts of action and involvement of the learner, empowerment, freedom to learn, discovery by going beyond existing frameworks to novel reformulations, or as Bruner describes it, 'going beyond the information given', and further, engaging in discovery through 'combinatorial creativity' which brings participants from a range of experiences or subject backgrounds to work together, achieving new insights through the juxtaposition of their varied knowledge frameworks:

> … progress in science seems to occur on the margins between fields. There is virtually no research available on this type of combinatorial creativity.(Bruner, 1957).

All of this relates to heuristic reflexivity for us because it also reflects dimensions of our research focus, particularly in relation to the political culture of worker education and research as rooted in participation, collective action, participatory control and democracy; and the implications of this when workers and academics with contrasting backgrounds come together in collective engagement in research.

(ii) Collaboration as part of reflexivity and as an aid to evaluation

Our collaboration as a research team mirrors aspects of the culture of worker education and research outlined above, where the notion of collaboration in research is by no means new. However, what is novel in our approach is the exploratory attempt to bring together the theoretical and methodological implications of reflexivity as I have discussed them, and to set these alongside the problematic of evaluation, particularly in relation to the development of both ***criteria*** and ***means*** of assessment in qualitative research.

Part of the ***means*** of assessment for us is reflection on our emergent methodology and findings. As a group we have had to develop ways to work together effectively. Part of our approach to this is our attempt to systematise what might otherwise have been fairly random and formless practice. To this end, regular and democratically organised research meetings have taken place, recorded by detailed notes taken in turn by different members of the research group. Notes would indicate for example, decisions made, how tasks would be divided and undertaken, progress reporting, and so on — a practice relating to reflexivity in allowing for recorded exploration of data gathering decisions, decisions influencing changes in focus, discussion of theoretical biases and assumptions, the role of the 'devil's advocate' in collaboration, indeed, many of the dimensions of access outlined in Marshall and Rossman, above.

As meetings progressed we systematised further by using audio tape to capture more of the essence of ideas which were otherwise lost in the dynamics of dialogue and exchange. Our collaborative method is now to record regular meetings, to produce an abstract of processes from a first listening to the tape to act as notes of the meeting to be circulated to members at the earliest possible time, followed by a full transcript to give as close a representation as possible of the meeting as a whole. In this way all members have a complete account of the meeting, representing one level of collaborative data, analysis of which is a group decision, representing another level of collaborative data.

Analysis methodology is still in the process of formulation. A number of frameworks suggest themselves, for example from a task orientation perspective analytic dimensions would include: approaches/methods, objectives, evaluation skills/criteria, research management issues, research/researcher team responsibilities, and process. Within this an input-output model could be employed touching on discussion, evidence, argument, opinion, formulation, negotiation, participation, supportive, co-operative (all as aspects of input); and, decisions, problem solving, problem identification, task identification, development, motivation, skills, and meeting objectives (all as aspects of output). For a recent contribution to discussion of analysis methodology see Drew and Heritage (1992). 'Talk at Work'.

The value of our collaborative data and analysis is yet to be assessed, although, even at this early stage benefits are apparent, particularly longitudinally where we will be able to trace in detail how our reflexive and accumulative processes are embedded.

(iii) Evaluation as on-going and Democratic

Finally, the collaborative and developing scope of our work has implications for models of evaluation. In touching on the culture of worker education and research I have already indicated parallels of ideology between this and our own approach. In evaluation theory this framework relates to the Democratic Evaluation Model outlined by MacDonald (1977). He identifies a number of characteristics of democratic evaluation which he contrasts with two other models — autocratic and bureaucratic. The key concepts of democratic evaluation are confidentiality, negotiation and accessibility, all of which rest on the basic value of an informed citizenry and the 'right to know'. In contrast, bureaucratic and autocratic evaluation involve concepts of objectivity, efficiency and utility, and suggest a shared perspective of external evaluation. The democratic approach seems to offer the potential for a more collaborative framework bringing internal and external view points together in a joint or negotiated assessment.

Conclusion

Through reflexive processing bringing together academics and workers engaged in 'research as education', we as a research team are focussing collaboratively on collaborative activity. Through this dual level approach to data gathering and analysis we hope to sharpen focus around qualitative evaluation, employing a methodology which is emergent and conceptualised around the notion that ***in qualitative research the process is part of the evidence*** in the move towards the development of a 'heuristic reflexivity'.

This has been a discussion outline and report on themes underlying research in early stages. Our methods of collaboration and related attempts to systematise what is usually thought of as a more spontaneous or ad hoc process (however accurate or inaccurate this notion may be) are still undergoing levels of refinement as we encounter and tackle new difficulties and recognise in ourselves that working together effectively is a matter of continual negotiation, stating, clarifying and reiterating ideas, methods and objectives.

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RESEARCH: REFLECTING PRACTICE

Papers from the annual SCUTREA conference

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